NEW MICHAEL · ANNA · CATHERINE II · PETER I · NICHOLAS II

THE ROMANOVS

From despots to doomed tsars, discover over 300 years of imperial decadence

1613-1917
Three centuries of intrigue, ambition, treachery and revolution

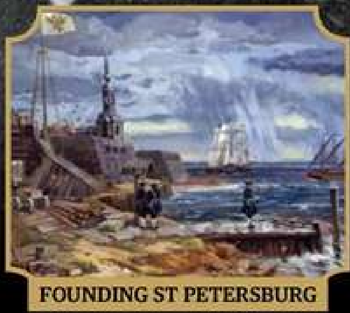
LAST OF THE TSARS

Inside the massacre of the imperial family

CONSPIRACY AT COURT

The struggles & schemes that defined a dynasty

TREASURES & JEWELS



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REVOLT & REVOLUTION

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On 12 February 1984, Grand Duchess Anastasia of the overthrown Romanov family died – or so many believed. In fact, this elderly lady was an imposter; a Polish peasant girl who'd duped the world for over five decades. When the lie was revealed, this great conspiracy once again captivated the world.

But the imperial family were no stranger to mystery and intrigue – over the course of three centuries, the Romanovs courted scandal, from the trysts of Catherine the Great to the disappearance of Ivan VI.

Over the following pages, we reveal the scandalous rise of this royal dynasty, from the surprise ascent of Tsar Michael I and the enlightened reign of Peter the Great, to the tragic abdication and murder of Tsar Nicholas II in the midst of World War I.

FUTURE

THE
ROMANOVS

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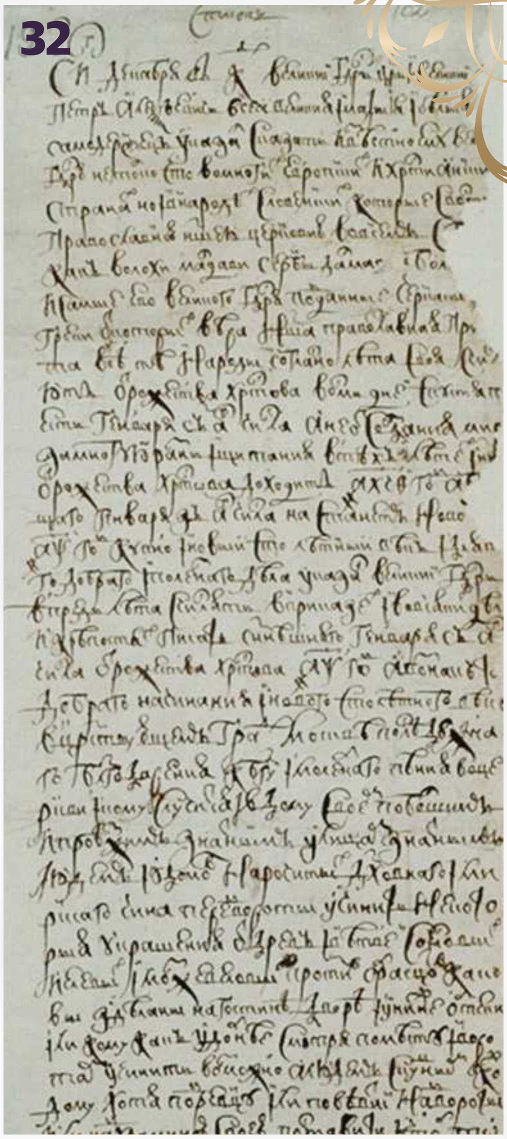

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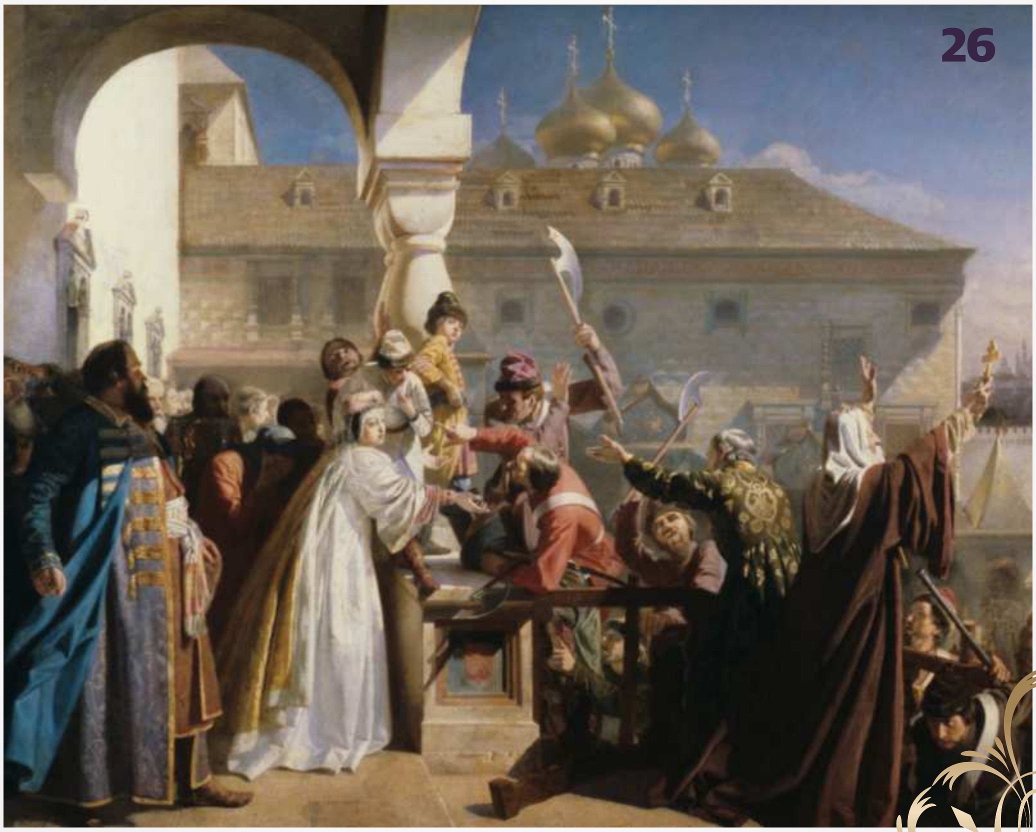


THE PEDIGREE

Discover the lineage of the tsars and tsarinas that took Russia from imperial autocracy to ruin and revolution

1 Order of succession

Marriage

1

– 1613-1645 –

Michael I

b.1596-d.1645

2

– 1645-1676 –

Alexis I

b.1629-d.1676

Second tsar of the dynasty, Alexis I had 16 children between two wives – 13 with Maria and three with Natalya.

Maria Miloslavskaya

b.1624-d.1669

Natalya Naryshkina

b.1651-d.1694

3

– 1676-1682 –

Feodor III

b.1661-d.1682

Disfigured and half-paralysed, the young tsar was disabled from birth. His death sparked the Moscow Uprising of 1682.

Sophia

b.1657-d.1704

4

– 1682-1689 –

Ivan V

b.1666-d.1696

Seriously disabled both physically and mentally, Ivan V co-reigned with Peter the Great. His sister served as regent.

Praskovia Saltykova

b.1664-d.1723

Eudoxia Lopukhina

b.1669-d.1731

5

– 1682-1725 –

Peter I

b.1672-d.1725

6

– 1725-1727 –

Catherine I

b.1684-d.1727

Catherine was the first woman to rule imperial Russia.

Charlotte Christine

b.1694-d.1715

Alexis Petrovich

b.1690-d.1718

Charles Frederick

b.1700-d.1739

Anna Petrovna

b.1708-d.1728

8

– 1730-1740 –

Anna

b.1693-d.1740

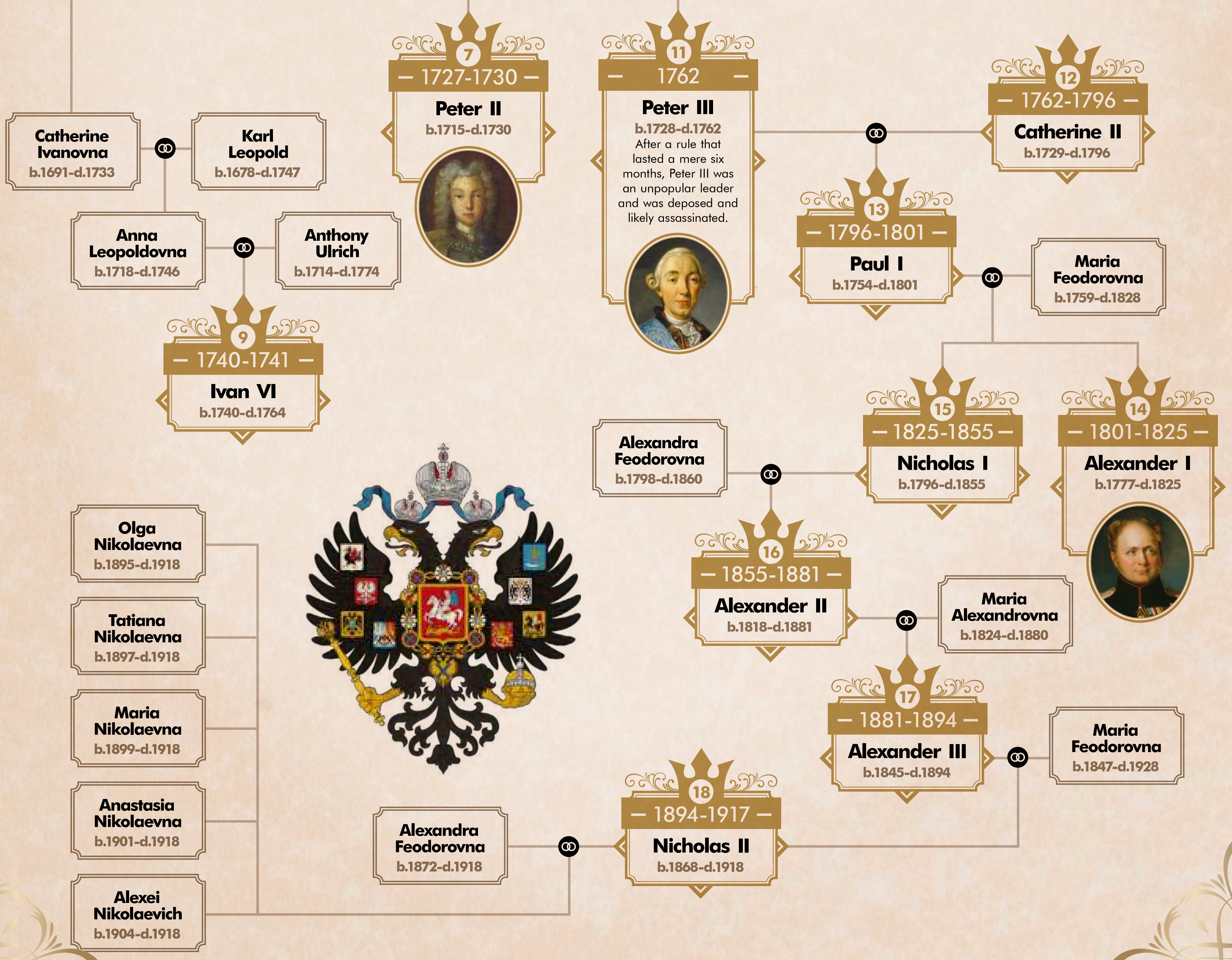
Under the strict care of her mother, Anna was prevented development of a personality, which made her a cruel ruler of the dynasty.

10

– 1741-1762 –

Elizabeth I

b.1709-d.1762


Catherine Ivanovna
b.1691-d.1733
Karl Leopold
b.1678-d.1747
Anna Leopoldovna
b.1718-d.1746
Anthony Ulrich
b.1714-d.1774
9
1740-1741
Ivan VI
b.1740-d.1764
7
1727-1730
Peter II
b.1715-d.1730
11
1762
Peter III
b.1728-d.1762
12
1762-1796
Catherine II
b.1729-d.1796
13
1796-1801
Paul I
b.1754-d.1801
Maria Feodorovna
b.1759-d.1828
15
1825-1855
Nicholas I
b.1796-d.1855
14
1801-1825
Alexander I
b.1777-d.1825
Alexandra Feodorovna
b.1798-d.1860
16
1855-1881
Alexander II
b.1818-d.1881
Maria Alexandrovna
b.1824-d.1880
17
1881-1894
Alexander III
b.1845-d.1894
Maria Feodorovna
b.1847-d.1928
18
1894-1917
Nicholas II
b.1868-d.1918
Alexandra Feodorovna
b.1872-d.1918
Olga Nikolaevna
b.1895-d.1918
Tatiana Nikolaevna
b.1897-d.1918
Maria Nikolaevna
b.1899-d.1918
Anastasia Nikolaevna
b.1901-d.1918
Alexei Nikolaevich
b.1904-d.1918

After a rule that lasted a mere six months, Peter III was an unpopular leader and was deposed and likely assassinated.

MICHAEL I

A TIME OF TROUBLES

The end of the Rurik dynasty in 1598 sent Russia into a period of civil war, invasion and economic decline but out of the embers, a new, equally formidable regime would emerge

Words **Jon Wright**

The Rurik dynasty traced its origins to the 9th century and, from its base in Novgorod, went on to play a starring role in Russian history for 700 years. With the arrival of Ivan IV, the so-called 'Terrible', who reigned from 1547, it reached its zenith. Unfortunately, Ivan's son and successor, Feodor Ivanovich, was of feeble mind and failed to produce an heir. With his death in 1598, the Rurikid story all but came to an end. Into the breach stepped Boris Godunov, Feodor's brother-in-law, the man who had effectively ruled Russia during Feodor's reign. He had performed well so far - pursuing astute foreign policies and, in the realm of Church affairs, establishing an independent Russian patriarchate - but his time as tsar was markedly less successful.

Many of Russia's loftiest families did not relish the prospect of a man such as Godunov, who did not inhabit the highest social echelons, taking charge of the country. These dissenters included the Romanovs, a dynasty that could trace its ancestry and influence back to Andrei Kobyla in the 14th century. The Romanovs were not shy about their discontent and Godunov, always willing to take punitive action, sent some of them into exile. The head of the family, Feodor, was forced to abandon his wife and enter a monastery, where he adopted the name Filaret. His son, Michael, was sent hundreds of miles away from Moscow.

Thus began the so-called 'Time of Troubles', a devastating and chaotic era in Russian history, brimful of foreign invasions, pretenders to the throne, far too many tsars and economic hardship. The politics were tortuous, but the weather was even worse. Between 1601 and 1603, a prolonged cold snap ravaged harvests and, by some accounts, as much as one-third of Russia's population perished. Starvation always breeds dissent and the era witnessed more than its share of uprisings, notably, after Godunov's time as tsar, the rebellion led by Ivan Bolotnikov in 1606-07, which was named after him.

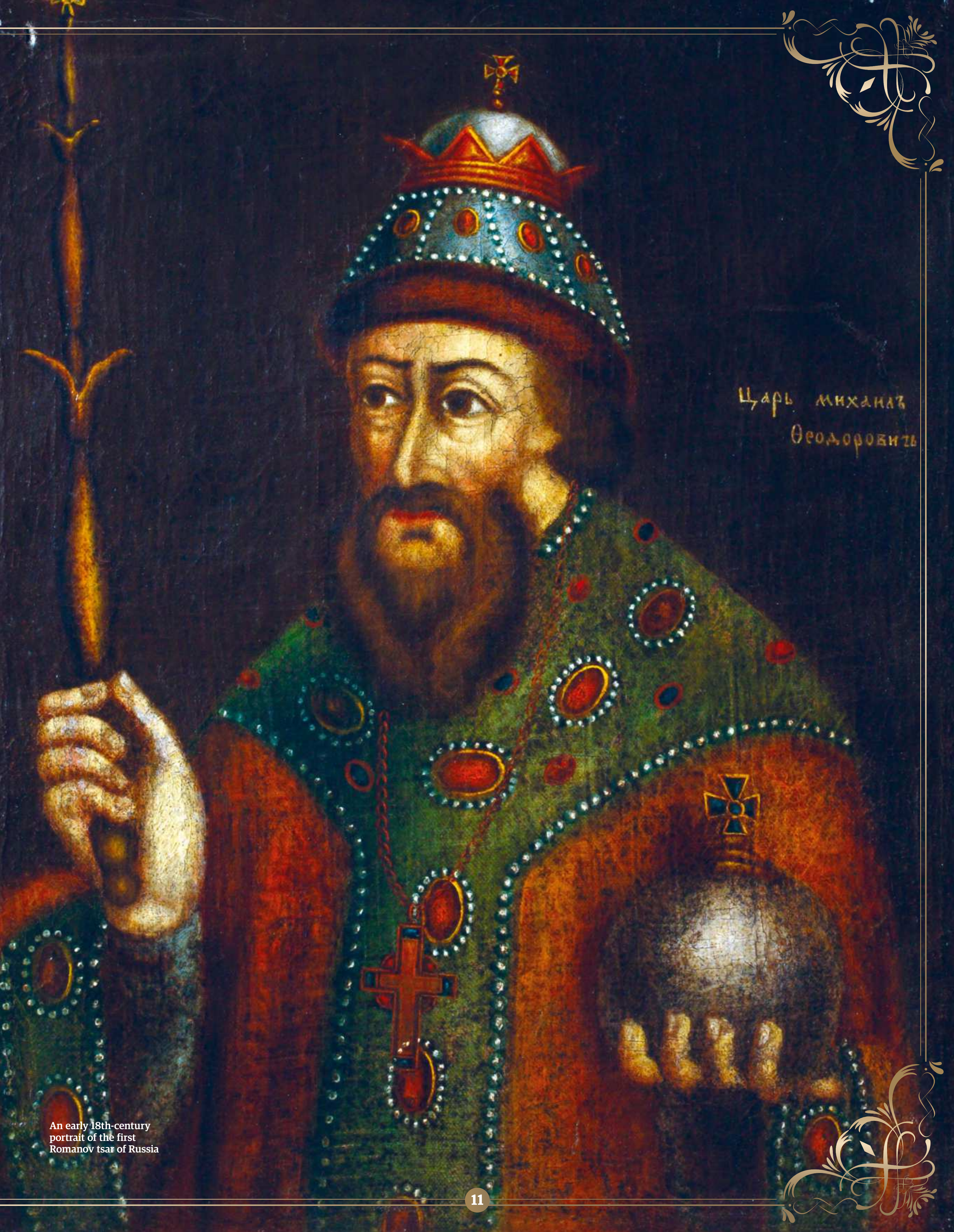
Russia's greatest political problem was the predictable desire of Russia's tradition rivals - with Sweden and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth leading the pack - to take advantage of the nation's weakness. A decidedly bizarre set of events unfolded, involving at least three characters who claimed to be Dmitry, the son and rightful heir of Ivan IV. All were imposters, since the true Dmitry had died more than a decade earlier, but this did not prevent their antics from wreaking havoc. The Romanovs would contribute to, and ultimately benefit from, this strange turn in Russian politics.

First on the scene was the first False Dmitry, popping up in 1603 and easily securing the support of Godunov's enemies in Russia, disgruntled Cossacks to the south and leading members of the Polish elite. Even the Vatican welcomed his arrival as a possible means of winning Russia over to Catholicism. Before too long, Polish troops, German mercenaries and Cossacks were invading Russian territory and what came to be known as the Dymitriad wars had begun. The conflict did not go well for the supporters of the False Dmitry but, with a stroke of luck, Godunov died in 1605 and new opportunities arose. On paper, Feodor, Godunov's son, became tsar but with renewed zeal, the False Dmitry pressed on and strode into Moscow in June 1605, claiming to be the rightful ruler of all Russia. The Romanovs, whose support had been eagerly sought, were rewarded with the appointment of Filaret to high clerical office.

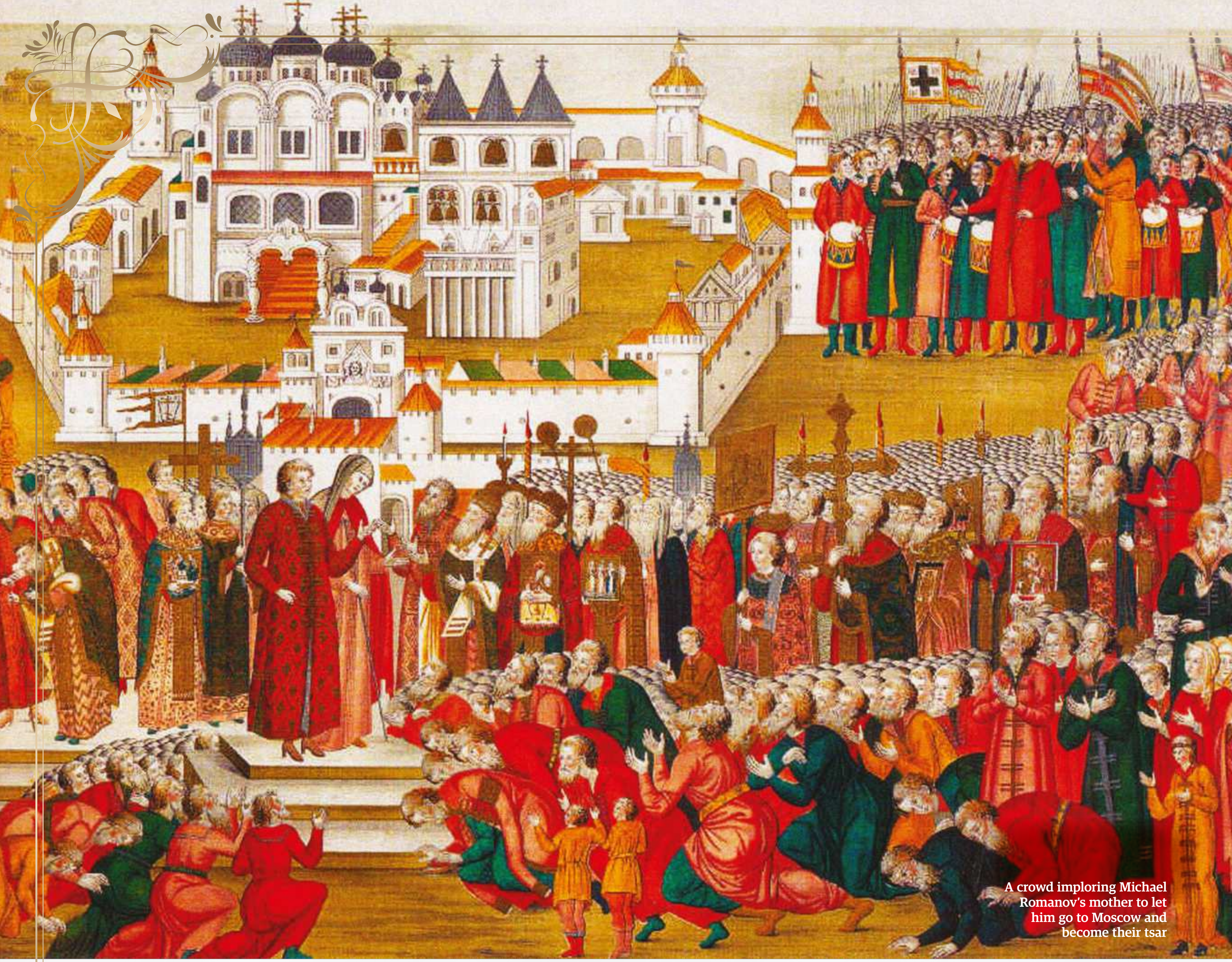
Not that the first False Dmitry would retain power for long. He was quickly suspected of being a Polish puppet and someone who would allow excessive foreign influences to shape Russia's future. In 1606, Moscow rose in protest and Vasili Shuisky, who could claim kinship with the mighty Ruriks, was made Tsar Vasili IV. Needless to say, Vasili did not please everyone and so the cavalcade of pretenders continued.

A second False Dmitry emerged and, again, received support from Poland and alienated Russian nobles. Once again, the Romanovs took full advantage, with Filaret ascending to the lofty role of Patriarch of all Russia. It is hard to resist levelling the charge of gullibility: later on, a third False Dmitry arrived on the scene and the Cossacks put forward Peter, a supposed son of the last Rurik tsar, even though such a person had never existed.

In any event, the second False Dmitry secured significant military victories but was not able to capture Moscow. Nonetheless, a nervous Vasili IV sought allies and turned to Sweden, securing an alliance in exchange for territorial concessions in


Царь михаилъ
Ѳеодоровичъ

An early 18th-century portrait of the first Romanov tsar of Russia


A crowd imploring Michael Romanov's mother to let him go to Moscow and become their tsar

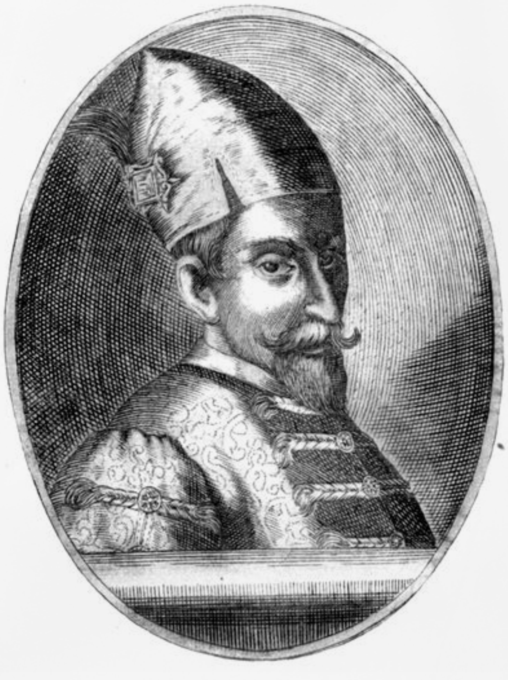
1609. This caused great alarm in Poland, whose enmity with Sweden was ferocious.

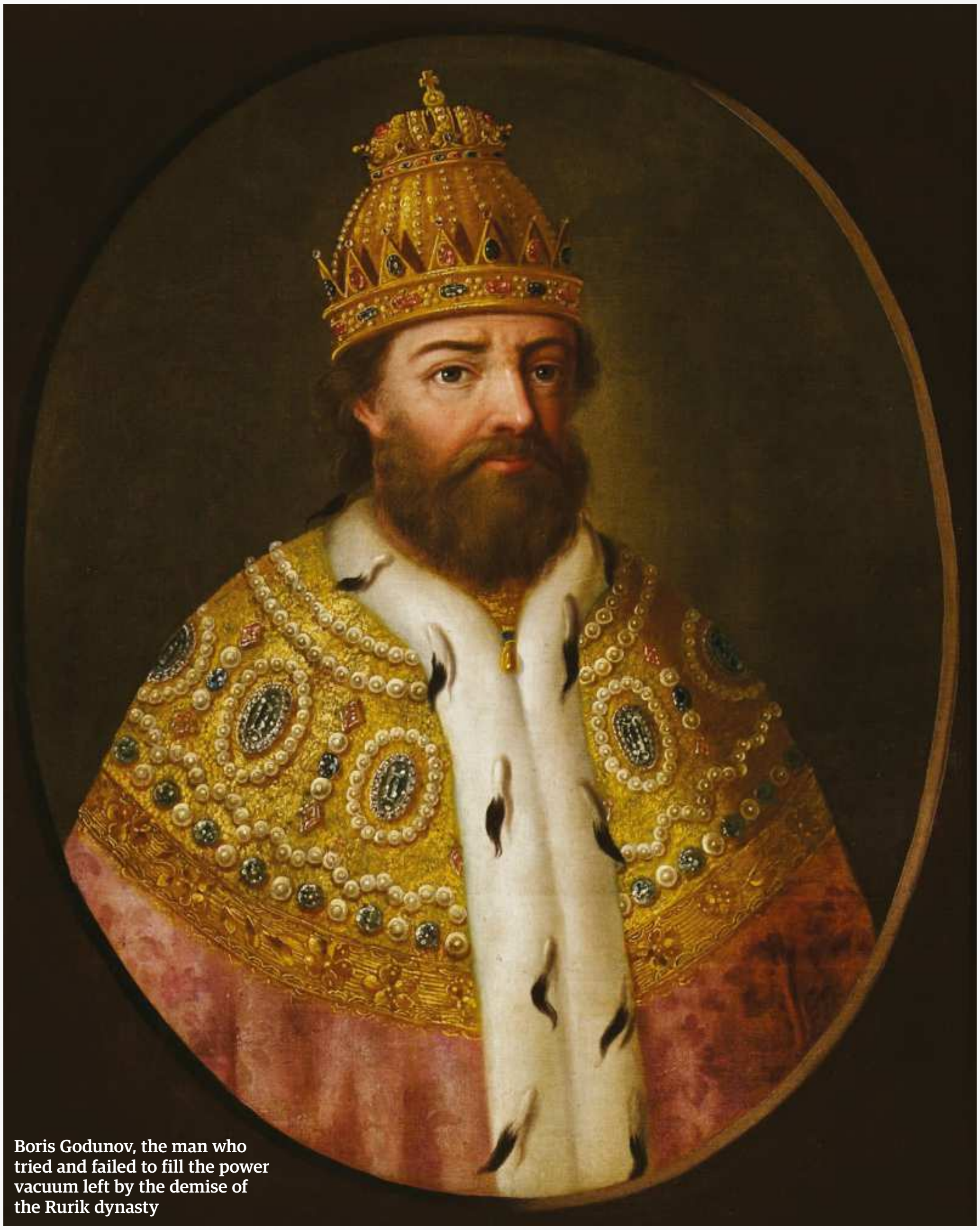
Up to this point, the Polish king had not formally declared war against Russia, but simply allowed and supported attempts to undermine the Russian regime. The alliance with Sweden pushed him over the brink. Sigismund III brushed the second False Dmitry aside and hatched some exotic plans - perhaps either he or his son could become ruler of Russia. Sigismund appears to have been more drawn to the former option: he saw an opportunity to impose his faith on what he regarded a heretical nation. But in the end it was his son, Władysław, who was granted the honour.

Formal war was declared in 1609 and led to conflicts that remained deeply embedded in the historical imaginations of both Poles and Russians for centuries. The Battle of Klushino in July 1610 was a prime example. Though vastly outnumbered, Polish troops secured victory in what one contemporary regarded as an almost miraculous fashion: "About that I shall remember, for it is beyond belief, that the companies managed eight or ten times to fall upon the enemy… our equipment was broken and our strength was dissipated."

By 1610, Vasili IV had been removed, the Poles had entered Moscow, and Władysław was, at least notionally, the ruler of Russia. Into the bargain, Polish military action had captured Smolensk. A convenient ending to such a ridiculously convoluted story can hardly be expected, however. Russian resistance to Polish intrusion was fierce - Moscow rose in rebellion and, under the leadership of the merchant Kuzma Minin and Prince Dmitry Pozharsky, Moscow was reclaimed in 1612, with the Poles sent scurrying. The burning issue was, quite simply, what to do next?

It had been a terrible period. Leaving aside Poland's actions, the Swedish had also made territorial gains on Russian soil - notably Novgorod - and the Tatars from the south had not been slow to exploit the situation. Even armies that had attempted to aid the Russian cause had inflicted damage. One such, as a contemporary recalled, had only augmented "the miseries of Russia" since "who can stay an army from spoil and rapine", not only on a nation's "goods and chattels but even on its wives and daughters, which in all places were

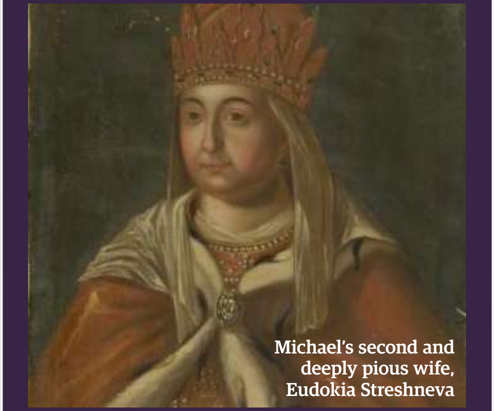

Feodor I, whose death in 1598 brought an end to the Rurik hold on power



Boris Godunov, the man who tried and failed to fill the power vacuum left by the demise of the Rurik dynasty

THE HARD LIFE OF A TSAR'S WIFE

Marrying into royalty isn't all it seems



Michael's second and deeply pious wife, Eudokia Streshneva

On the face of things, Eudoxia Streshneva had little to complain about - being the second wife of a tsar was surely not the toughest of wickets. However, Eudoxia had endured a lonely childhood and her time as Michael's consort was far from pleasant. The rules and regulations of being a noblewoman in 17th-century Russia were to be expected - a life of seclusion, away from all but her nearest and dearest - but the constant pestering and surveillance unleashed by her mother-in-law must have been difficult to tolerate.

Perhaps this is why Eudoxia devoted much of her time to charitable and devotional pursuits and funding religious building projects; the life of the soul was a safer harbour. By contrast, Michael's first wife, Maria Dolgorukova, had been looked upon in a much kindlier light by his mother: after all, it had taken far too long to secure a bride for her son, and Maria was well-connected. Unfortunately, Maria fell ill and died within just four months of her marriage to the tsar. Rumours of her having been poisoned are most likely greatly exaggerated.

> "STABILITY WAS CRUCIAL AND MICHAEL DID NOT LACK RIVALS"

made a prostituted prey to the lustful appetites of the soldiers".

Russia was in financial crisis, riven by factional disputes and it was evident that a new tsar was required. Among a host of candidates, some eyes fell on the brother of the Swedish king, but the consensus was that someone of Russian stock was a much safer option. No fewer than 800 delegates finally settled, after weeks of discussion, on Michael Romanov. He was of impeccable pedigree, and he could even claim a link to the sorely missed Rurik dynasty: an ancestor had been married to Ivan IV. He was also, to be frank, something of a compromise candidate.

Michael was far from sure that he wanted the job, and his mother wasn't particularly keen, either. At first, she was adamant that such a mighty burden should not be imposed upon her son. Ultimately, though, Michael gave way and in 1613, at the age of 16, he was elected as tsar. At the coronation, the officiating priest made Michael's duties abundantly clear: "Oh God-crowned tsar and grand prince Michael, autocrat of all Russia. The sceptre is given to you to govern Russia, guard it and keep it. Rule the kingdom according to the will of God." The Romanov dynasty had begun, albeit in the most perilous of circumstances. But was Michael up to the task?

Assessments of Michael's reign are mixed. It is often suggested that the new tsar was overly reliant on the counsel of others, most notably his father. Perhaps, some argue, he was only chosen because it was believed that he could be easily manipulated. During debates over who to elect as the tsar, one delegate had been rather blunt: "He is still young and not yet wise; he will suit our purposes."

It is certainly true that, at least at first, Michael had little choice but to pursue a consensual strategy: meetings of the zemsky sobor, the national assembly, were held almost annually during the first decade of his reign. Stability was crucial and Michael did not lack rivals or enemies. After all, even Władysław of Poland had not relinquished his dubious claim to be the rightful ruler and, rather stupidly, would launch one final assault on Russia in 1617.

It seems equally clear that Michael's father, Filaret, who returned from imprisonment by the Poles in 1619, was a dominant figure - at the very least, the tsar's equal. One contemporary remarked that he was "so imperious that even the tsar was afraid of him", and that "beneath his ecclesiastical robes beats the heart of a power-hungry boyar". After so much foreign intrusion, Michael's father was particularly keen to allow Russia to plod along on its own terms without the interference of Europe's great powers. He was "narrow-minded to the point of bigotry" in this regard. Up to his death in 1633, Filaret was the power behind the throne.

Michael's great achievement, beyond the specifics of policy, was that he forged intense loyalty to the Romanov dynasty in a remarkably short space of time. He cultivated a reputation as a kindly man - one that was perhaps not richly deserved - but, beyond that, he exploited the belief that whatever policy might be pursued, loyalty to the tsar should be unquestioned. This cultural staple was summed up in the stories and legends that rose up around him. One of the most famous, that echoed down the ages, becoming the subject of theatre and opera, concerned Ivan Susanin. The story told of Polish troops who were hunting for Michael shortly after his election as tsar. They encountered Susanin, a humble logger, and, after having tortures inflicted upon him, Susanin promised to lead them to Michael. But this was merely a deception - Susanin would never betray Michael. He led the troops deep into a forest where they became stranded and presumably perished. Susanin became a hero of legend: the man who would endure anything to serve his tsar.

"HE FORGED INTENSE LOYALTY TO THE ROMANOV DYNASTY"

The Romanovs were always keen to exploit such loyalty, and they bolstered the cause by stressing their dignified status, exaggerating their genealogical credentials and attempting to erase less edifying aspects from their recent history. Rather absurdly, propaganda claimed that the final Rurik tsar had hoped the Romanovs would succeed him, while Romanov involvement with the False Dmitrys (both one and two) was not to be spoken of.

Ruthlessness was also a key aspect of policy during Michael's reign. Anyone who challenged the tsar's legitimacy or began to talk about some new pretender to the throne could expect brutal punishment. From the very beginning, bands of brigands, who had been thriving during the Time of Troubles, were hunted down, while obvious threats, such as the Cossack leader Ivan Zarutsky, were killed off.

Above all, Michael was positioned from the outset as a divinely chosen ruler who warranted the utmost respect. His official title was one of the longest in early-modern Europe and any attempt to curtail it was met with outrage. One English visitor to court attempted a shortened, but still extensive version, addressing Michael as "Emperor of all Russia, Great Duke of Volodemer, Moscow and Novgorod, King of Cazan, King of Astracam". When criticised, the visitor suggested that "the emperor's title was very long and could not be so well remembered by foreigners". But this simply wouldn't do and the full title was duly deployed. Indeed, even the increasingly frequent use of the word 'tsar' to describe Michael was a means of comparing him with Caesar and to make Moscow a new Rome. Image, as always, was everything.

In terms of the concrete achievements of Michael's reign, the list of successes is lengthy - starting a dynasty, after all, is rarely a straightforward task. The highest priority was to bring an end to the debilitating conflicts with Sweden and Poland. The former was achieved in

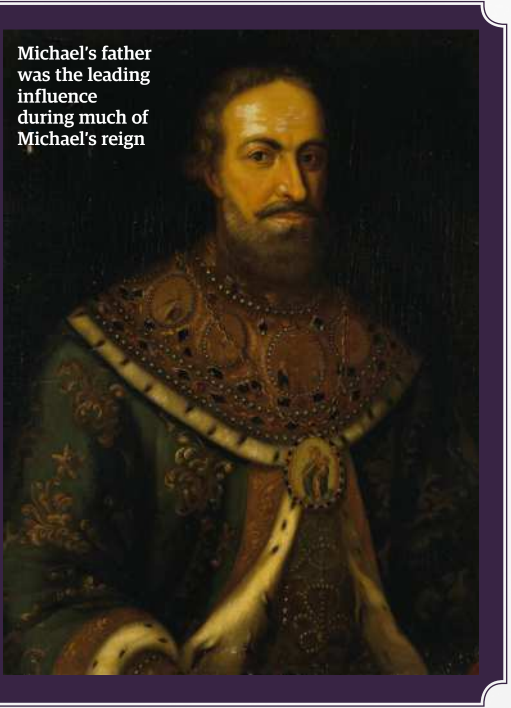
FATHER OF THE TSAR

Who was Filaret?

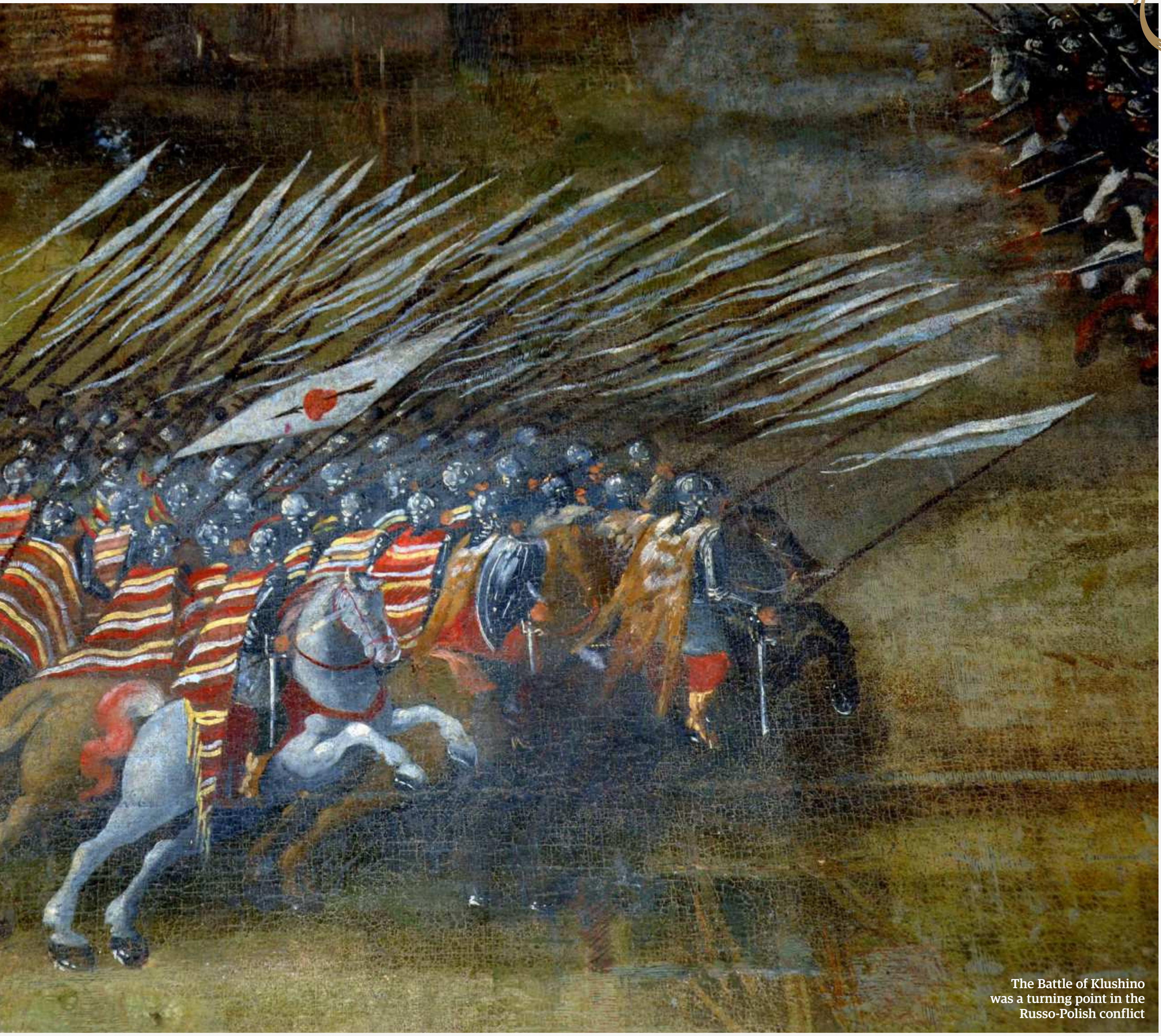
Feodor Romanov had made quite the name for himself during the last years of the Rurik dynasty, excelling in matters both diplomatic and military. When the final Rurik tsar died it was entirely possible that Feodor might have taken on the role, but Boris Godunov was having none of that.

Through the Time of Troubles, Feodor still managed to engage in intrigue from his isolated monastery and he is usually portrayed as a rather Machiavellian figure who dominated his son. There is some truth to this, but it is often forgotten that his commitment to religion was more than a facade. His interest in matters theological was genuine, his desire to sustain his particular vision of Russian Orthodoxy ran deep. That vision was not popular with all of his clerical colleagues and feathers were ruffled but, all told, he was a more rounded character than one might think.

It is important to concede, however, that Feodor made full use of his role as patriarch to flex his autocratic muscles and establish the Church as an alternative power base to the state.



Michael's father was the leading influence during much of Michael's reign



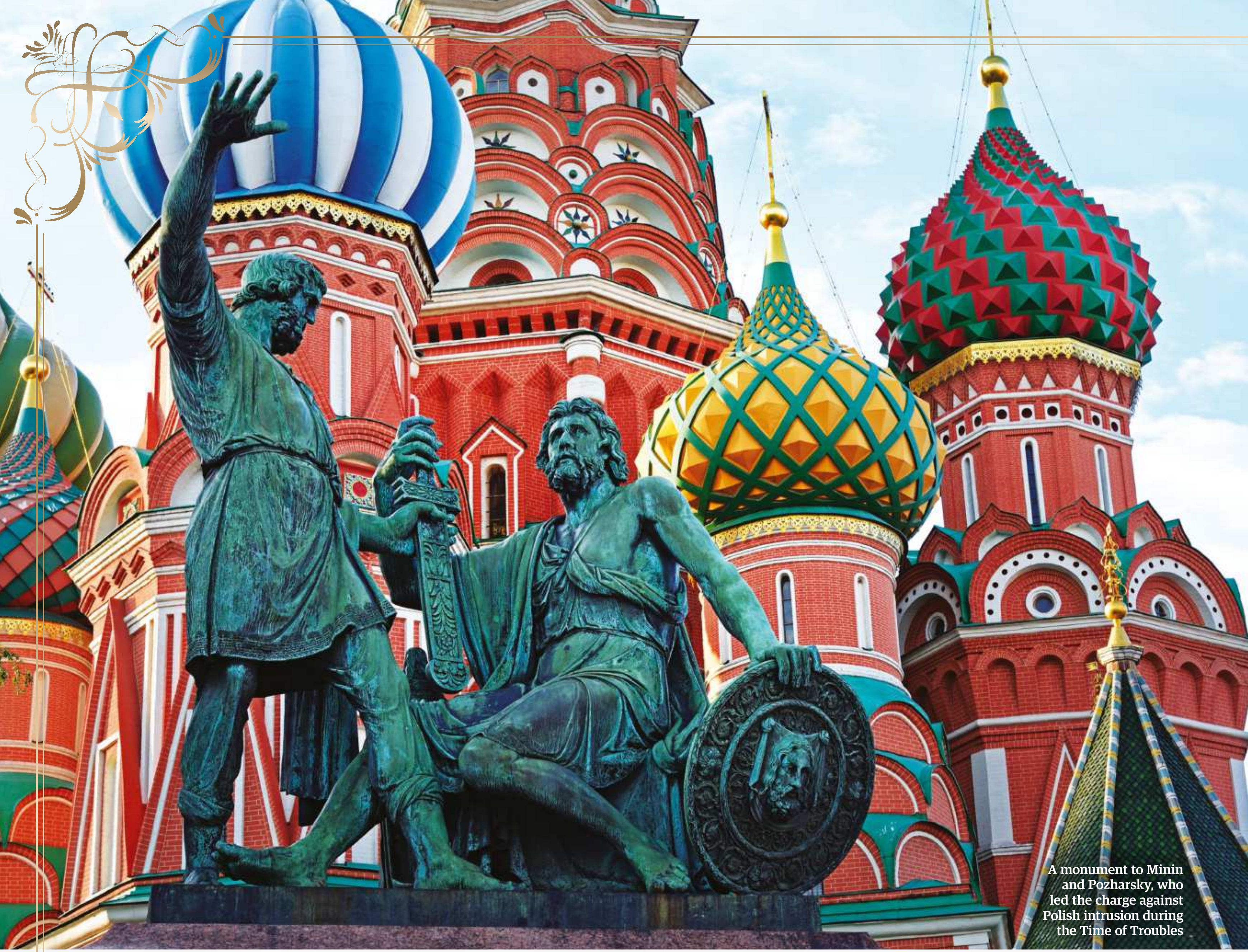
The Battle of Klushino was a turning point in the Russo-Polish conflict

1617, and while Sweden agreed to return Novgorod to Russian control, it retained possession of towns on the Gulf of Finland. All told, this was a price worth paying. A truce was arranged with Poland in 1618, with the Poles keeping hold of Smolensk. This issue would resurface in 1632 and another, rather shorter Russo-Polish war would be fought.

Through the reign, other enemies came and went, with the Tatars of Crimea becoming an increasingly irritating thorn in the Russian side, given their habit of kidnapping Russians and selling them into the Ottoman slave trade. On balance, it is probably safe to say that Michael would have been much happier if he had been left to tend to his beloved rose bushes, but his reign achieved its key objective: bringing some measure of order to a fragmented state and asserting Russia's presence in the region's political arenas. Attempts were made to reform Russia's finances, local administrative mechanisms were, at least to an extent, improved, and, after a short first marriage, Michael settled down with Eudoxia Streshneva, who gave him ten children.

As for the future, Russia's suspicion of the outside world was still much in evidence and the journey towards the unabashed cosmopolitanism of Peter the Great would be a long one. Culture differences were still glaringly obvious. When Michael sent an embassy to Denmark in 1642 with hopes of securing a marriage between his daughter Irina and the son of the Danish king, a portrait of Irina was requested – just as Western diplomatic protocol demanded. The Russian response was that a Russian princess could never be seen, either in the flesh or in effigy, by anyone other than her close relations.

The worlds were still some distance apart but, for all that, Michael was keen to recruit the services of



A monument to Minin and Pozharsky, who led the charge against Polish intrusion during the Time of Troubles

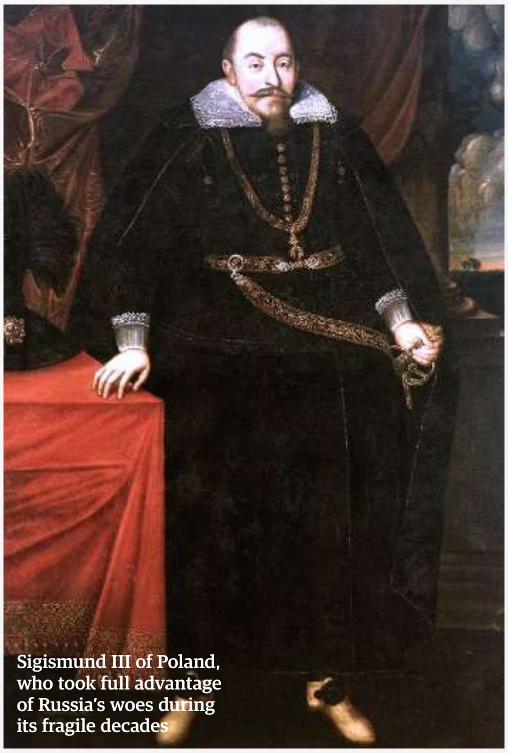
“MICHAEL WAS, AT TIMES, A PAWN IN A VERY COMPLEX GAME”

foreign cannon-makers, foreign soldiers to train his troops and to import the latest weaponry from western Europe. In 1624, 168 Polish soldiers, 113 German soldiers, and 64 Irish soldiers were to be found in Russia dispensing their military wisdom to the locals. By the 1630s, Swedish wheelwrights and carpenters were a common sight in the capital. On the right bank of the Yauza River, the German Quarter in Moscow, home to all and any overseas visitors to the capital, thrived. Russia even found time to expand its interests in the east to Siberia.

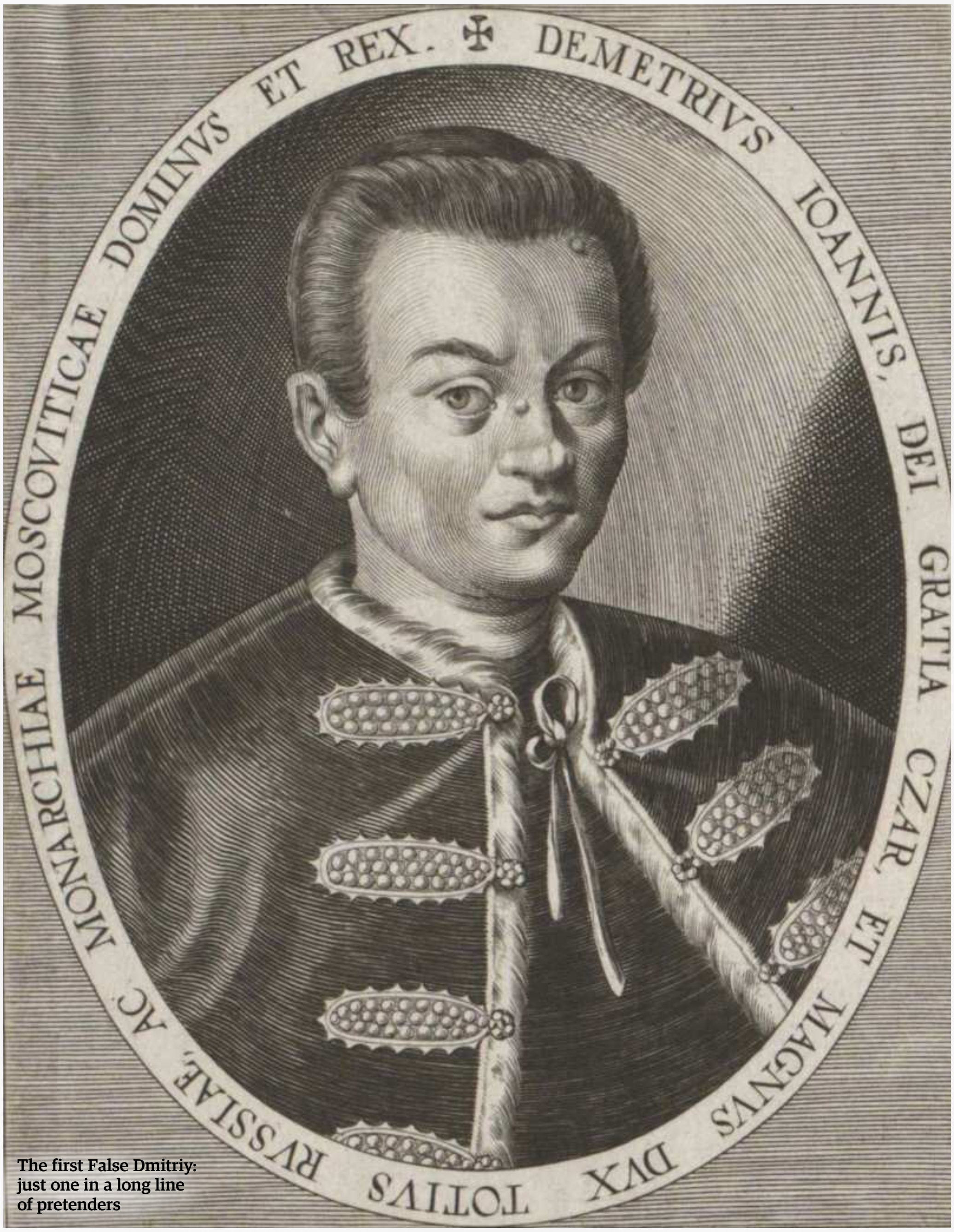
Michael was, at times, a pawn in a complex game, but his personal contribution to the establishment of the Romanov dynasty can easily be underestimated. He also began the recurrent Romanov habit of living with injury or illness - a leg wound pestered him throughout his life - and of dying in an unhappy way. The loss of two of his sons sent him into a deep depression and the tsar passed away in 1645.

It is tempting to conclude that, in such troubled times, Russia became increasingly inward-looking, fearful of too much contact with the outside world and content to heal its own wounds. Beyond doubt, a thirst for recovery and some semblance of order within the country was the Romanovs’ greatest advantage. The factionalism within the Russian elite never went away, and moments of protest from those on the lower rungs of society were not uncommon, but the hope that the Romanovs might bring stability was palpable. As was the notion that Russia must guard itself against the foreign intrusions that had so blighted the previous few decades. Nonetheless, the trend towards contact and encounter with other nations, which would come to define the Romanov outlook in future decades, had, in fact, been visible from the very beginning of Michael’s reign.

Within months of his coronation, Michael had already sent embassies to Germany, Holland, Denmark and England. Aleksei Ziuzin’s mission



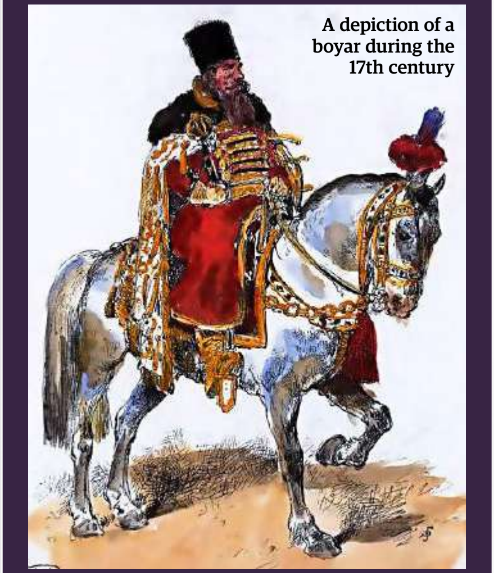
Sigismund III of Poland, who took full advantage of Russia’s woes during its fragile decades


DEMETRIVS IOANNIS, DEI GRATIA CZAR, ET MAGNVS DVX TOTIVS RVSSIAE, AC MONARCHIAE MOSCOVITICAE DOMINVS ET REX.

The first False Dmitriy: just one in a long line of pretenders

BATTLING BOYARS

The rivalries of Russia's boyar factions



A depiction of a boyar during the 17th century

In Russia's highly stratified, quasi-feudal society, the boyar was, aside from the loftiest princes and the tsar, at the top of the tree. Regrettably, tensions between different factions of boyars were apt to muddle Russian politics: indeed, many of the difficulties and complications of the Time of Troubles were made considerably more hazardous due to boyar in-fighting. A sense that not all boyars were created equal also muddied the waters.

Equally troubling was the boyars' resentment at their dwindling influence. From the time of Ivan IV there had been moves to centralise power, to keep regional autonomy in check and to rely less and less on boyar influence. Such trends continued under the early Romanovs, creating tensions that, while not crippling government, made life a good deal more difficult for the tsars. Insult was added to injury as a previous boyar monopoly on most of the significant roles in government was gradually eroded.

to the court of James I & VI was particularly noteworthy. The ostensible goal was to secure support and, with a little luck, funding, but the instructions given to Ziuzin demonstrate a keen understanding of the rules of Western diplomatic protocol and a passionate desire to understand what was going on around the continent.

Some of the advice given to the ambassador was of a solidly practical nature: "On the sea they should take great care that they nowhere encounter the Poles or the Lithuanians or the Swedes, so that they might pass safely." Given recent events, no-one could argue with that. If they made it to London, however, an extraordinarily detailed list of statements to be made to, and questions to be asked of the king was provided.

The ambassador was instructed to delve deeply into James's foreign policy objectives. Who did he support? With whom was he in contact? Where did he stand on the major geopolitical issues of the day? In addition, a blow-by-blow account of Russia's turbulent past few years was to be recounted to James: of how Russia's enemies had sought to "ruin the Moscow state more than before" and "strove to make confusion in the Moscow state and to spill blood in vain". Special attention was to be given to the Polish menace and "King Sigismund's injustice and evil design".

There would, of course, be time to "speak about other good and great things which will arise between us sovereigns and our great states to the good and peace of Christians". Surely it would be possible for James to "be in fraternal love and strong friendship with our tsar's majesty and stand together with us against all our enemies". On one level, this was the plea of a ruler in dire straits but, at the same time, a sign that Russia was capable of engaging with the rest of the world when this suited its purposes. Such a policy began with Michael I and it would become a hallmark of the Romanov way of doing things for years to come.

Michael I does not, perhaps, possess the glamour of some of his luminous Romanov successors and, far too frequently, he was not his own man. But without him, the Romanov adventure would not have been possible. The Cathedral of the Archangel in the Kremlin was the final resting place of almost every Russian ruler from 1331 to 1686. All the famous names are there and, on balance, Michael deserved his spot. Those who are keen on the Romanov dynasty doubtless find some satisfaction in the fact that the remains of one tsar is absent: Boris Godunov.

©Getty, Alamy

ALEXIS I

A TSAR OF CONTRADICTIONS

The reign of Alexis I represented a bridge between old and new Russia and the tsar, while no saint, managed to sustain Romanov control of a fractured and fearful nation

Words **Jon Wright**

The first years of Romanov rule had been precarious and the consequences - and opportunities - were inherited by Michael's son, Alexis, in 1645. The so-called Time of Troubles was assuredly over and the persistent arrival on the scene of pretenders to the throne had largely come to an end, but many challenges still lay ahead.

Stereotypes are rarely helpful in the study of history but, deploying a broad brush-stroke, many of the Romanovs do seem to have been able to combine gentle dispositions with the art of acting brutally when required. Alexis captures this tendency. He was perfectly willing to strike at his enemies with ferocity, and the Kremlin's dungeons hosted many guests during his reign. At times, his temper rose to fever pitch. He addressed one cleric who had exceeded his authority as "God-hater, Christ-hater… single-minded Satan, damned scoffing enemy".

But Alexis was also praised for his being approachable and he was renowned for his piety. The Kremlin became a veritable museum of precious relics, while Alexis could spend hours in prayer, often fasted, and became known as the "most quiet tsar". His time on the throne also saw a typical blend of success and calamity and he had an uncanny ability to recruit both excellent and atrocious advisers.

Alexis's reign was blighted by wars with Russia's traditional enemies and an alarming number of rebellions that encapsulated the social and regional tensions that have so often defined Russian history. Some major achievements were also secured, notably the uniting of Muscovy and part of Ukraine, though this rather annoyed the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (which very much ruled the roost in that part of the world). A 13-year war ensued, finally brought to an end through a sharing of the spoils, with Ukraine divided east and west of the Dnieper River. Into the bargain, Russia's territorial ambitions further north alarmed its old enemy Sweden and, so as not to be left out of the geopolitical morass, the Tatars of the Crimea were apt to vent their spleen against Moscow. Safavid Persia also decided to enter the fray along with the Ottoman Empire upon occasion.

As disruptive as all this was, however, it demonstrated Russia's emergence as one of Europe's Great Powers, as mixed a blessing as that may have been to those who ruled over the country. Whatever his flaws, Alexis was perhaps the first tsar to truly sense how mighty his nation might become in the modern world.

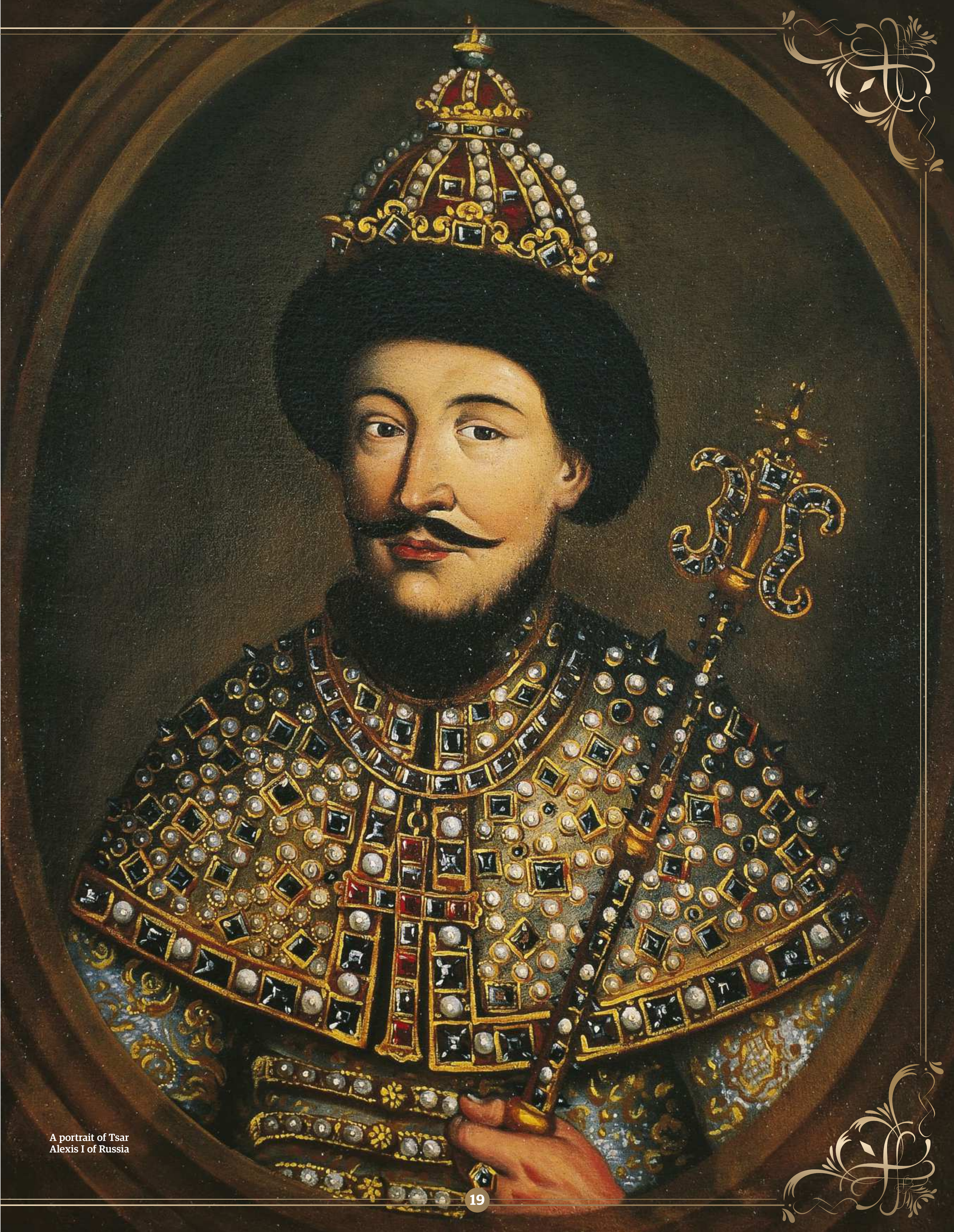
Rebellions and riots were rife. A Cossack rising in 1669 saw Stepan Razin leading thousands of Cossacks towards Moscow, though this insurgency was easily snuffed out. Rather too frequently, Alexis's chief ministers were responsible for provoking dissent among the populace. In the early years of his reign, the tsar was hugely dependent on Boris Morozov, his old tutor.

Morozov had helped to provide Alexis with a broad education - balanced between the practical, the physical and the intellectual - but, while a reform-minded man, he nevertheless had a taste for power and corruption. At this stage, Morozov acted, for all intents and purposes, as regent. Some useful policies were pursued - notably in the administration of the provinces - but, while Alexis enjoyed great popularity, Morozov became increasingly loathed by the ordinary people.

His decision to enforce and increase taxes on salt led to riots in 1648, a truly horrendous event that secured an enduring place in Russian historical memory. The Kremlin itself was invaded by protestors and across Moscow, and tens of thousands of houses were put to the torch.

Morozov's desire to insinuate himself into the highest echelons of power was not hard to spot. He intervened with some audacity in Alexis's marital plans. In 1647, the traditional bride show was mounted, during which no fewer than 200 potential spouses were introduced, but Alexis's choice was blocked by Morozov and, instead, he brokered the tsar's first marriage to Maria Miloslavskaya, the daughter of a close ally. The union would produce 13 children. Morozov also took care to marry Maria's sister in order to strengthen his own position at court.

Morozov certainly made a fortune as a result of his political status and, in the end, Alexis was reluctantly obliged to send him into exile. The pattern continued with Ilya Miloslavsky, Alexis's father-in-law, who, while in charge of the treasury, opted to replace silver coins with copper ones, causing a debasement of the currency, economic disaster and the so-called Copper Riot of 1662. In the wake of the disturbance, which had involved attacks on the homes of wealthy merchants, Alexis



A portrait of Tsar Alexis I of Russia

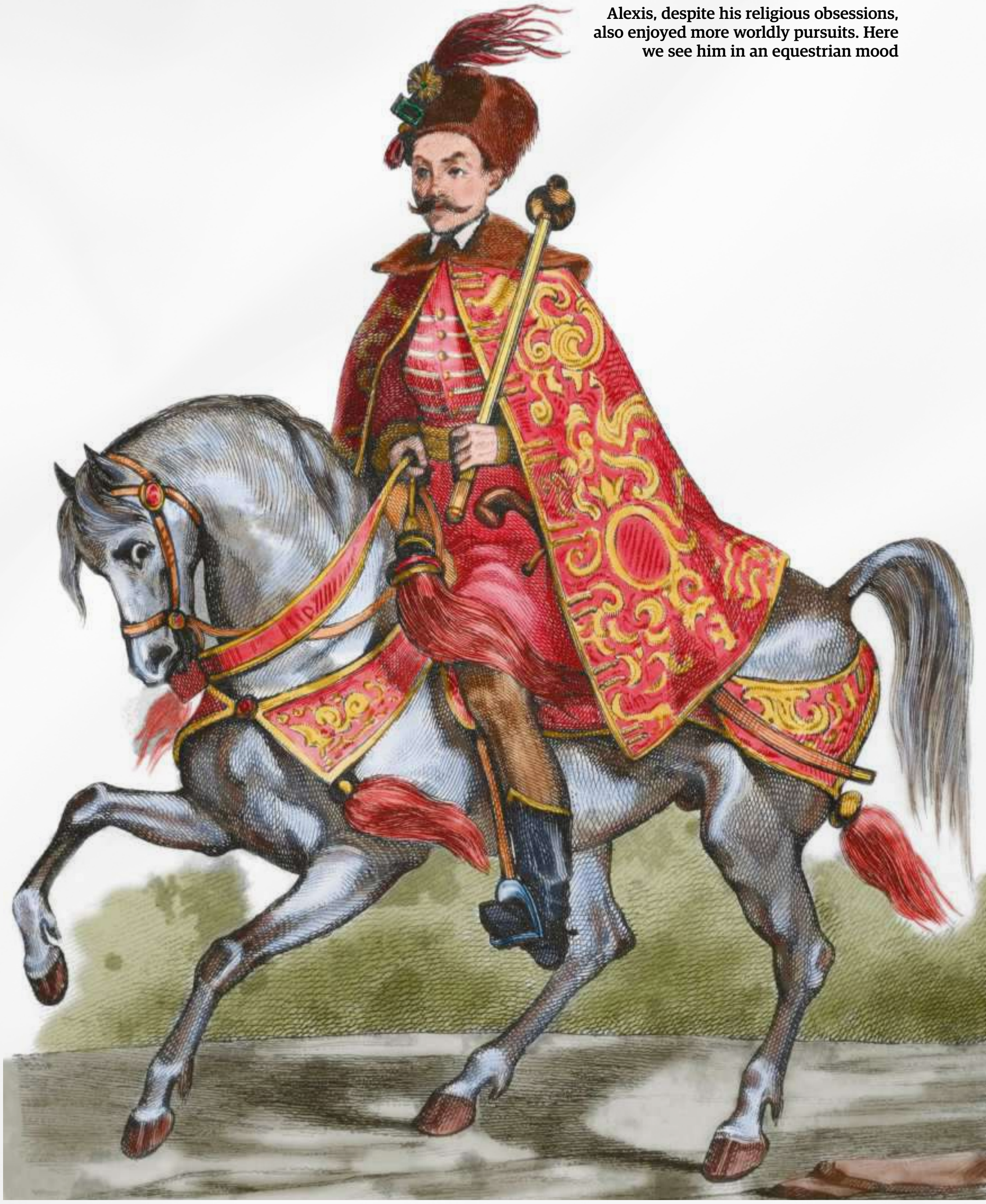
demonstrated his ability to be ruthless. As many as 1,000 people were executed. Fortunately, the Russian people almost always sustained the belief that a tsar was beyond reproach and blamed all and any injustices on the evil counsel that he must have been receiving.

On balance, Alexis was not the best judge of character and his wars were sometimes financially ruinous but, to his considerable credit, he managed to weather every storm. Efforts to modernise the military continued, with very well-paid experts and technological innovations arriving from the West. Gadgets and treasures also arrived from across the continent: music boxes, elaborate cutlery and much else besides. Diplomatic missions were established in countries across Europe, expeditions were sent out to seek the fabled riches of the East, and links with the Ukraine certainly widened Russian perspectives on the world. Alexis employed scholars from the region to instruct his children in Latin and Polish.

Theology was a trickier matter than warfare or pedagogy, however, and Alexis's reign witnessed disputes that caused a division at the heart of the religious establishment. Within the Russian Orthodox faith, there were those who sought alterations to long-established rituals and practices. They won the day at the Great Moscow Synod of 1666 but this created a lasting schism with the so-called "old-believers", which fragmented Russia's religious landscape for generations. This was not, however, a disaster for the tsar, since squabbles within the Church reduced its ability to influence matters of state - a boon for the emerging Romanov goal of political absolutism.

Alexis, despite his reformist tendencies in some areas, also helped to deepen social divisions within Russian society. A new legal code, the Sobornoye Ulozhenie, made life considerably more difficult for Russia's vast number of serfs, who represented as much as 80 per cent of the peasant population. From now on, they were to be tied to the land, to a specific estate, and not allowed to travel without express permission. Those who broke the rules would be pursued.

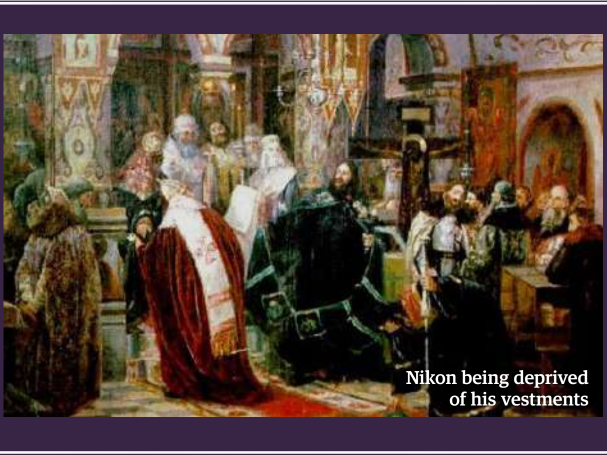
For all that, Alexis's reign can also be seen as a period of transition. He may have made poor



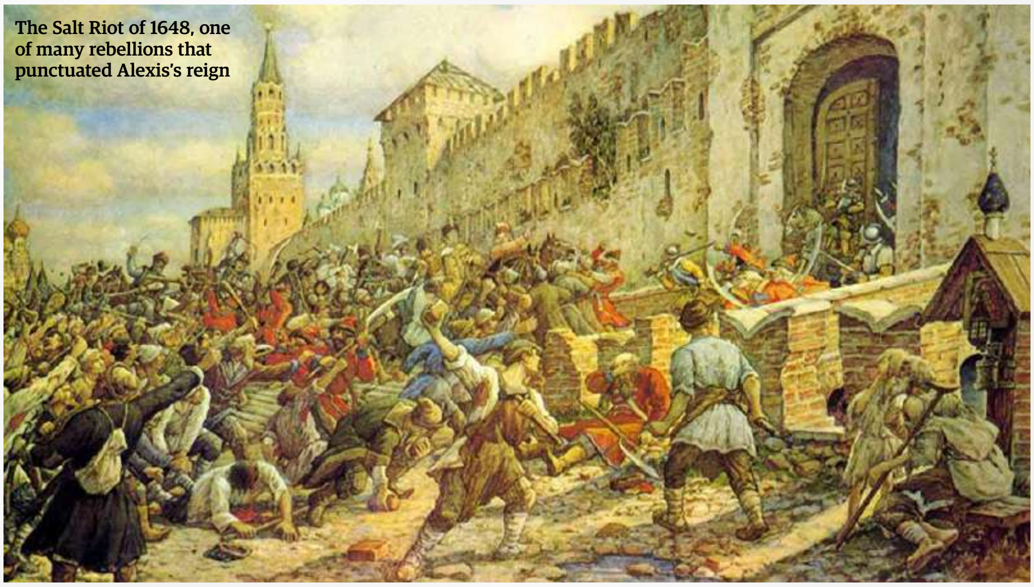
Alexis, despite his religious obsessions, also enjoyed more worldly pursuits. Here we see him in an equestrian mood

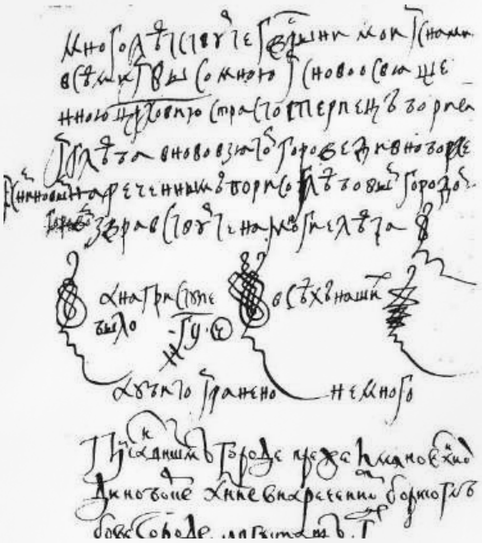
THE PUZZLING PATRIARCH Who was Nikon?

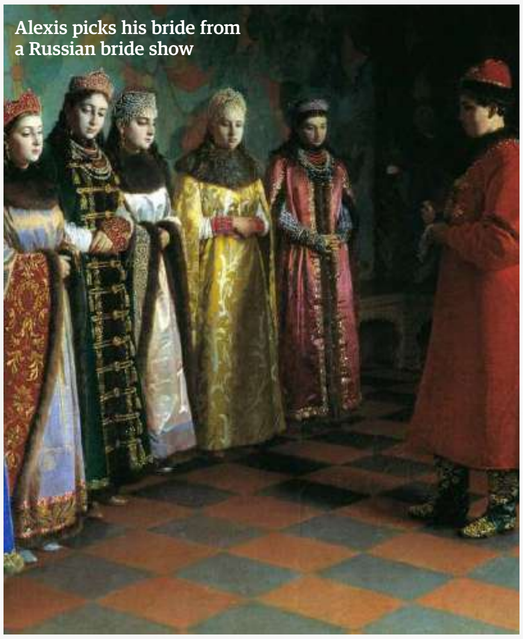
Nikon was a name that inspired and irritated 17th-century Russians in almost equal measure. He began life as the son of a peasant farmer and rose through the clerical ranks to become Patriarch of Moscow in 1652. A keen advocate of reform and with a desire to bring Russian Orthodoxy closer to the practices of the Greek Orthodox Church, he dealt harshly with his opponents - he is reputed to have sent soldiers to search out icons that were not to his taste and to gouge out the eyes of their owners. Some of the issues at stake can seem rather arcane: a debate, for example, over whether two or three fingers should be used when making the sign of the cross. But such things counted for a great deal at the time and created deep divisions among the Russian faithful. Alexis initially adopted Nikon as a trusted adviser, but the cleric's penchant for involving himself a little too zealously in affairs of state became irksome. At the Great Moscow Synod of 1666, Nikon was deposed and demoted to the status of a monk, though his broad theological trajectory was adopted.



Nikon being deprived of his vestments


The Salt Riot of 1648, one of many rebellions that punctuated Alexis's reign


Alexis attending to the details of government in this letter, in his hand, sent from Riga


Alexis picks his bride from a Russian bride show

> "ON BALANCE, ALEXIS WAS NOT THE BEST JUDGE OF CHARACTER"

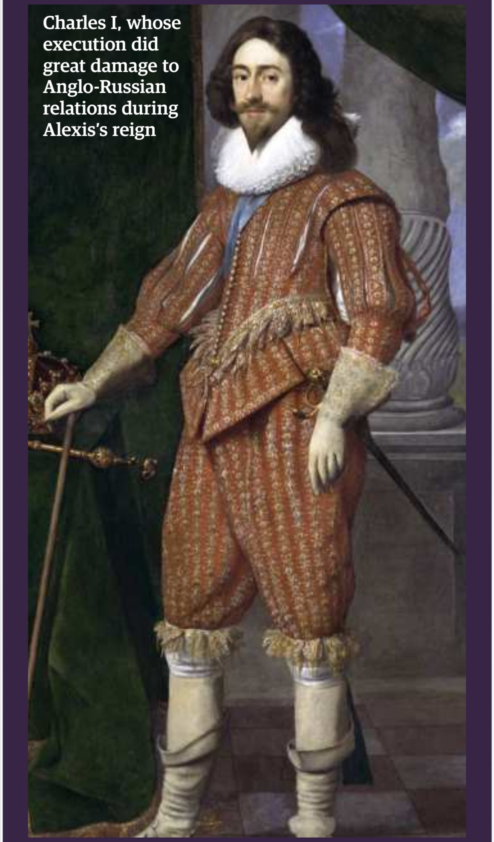
choices early on, but his ability to spot able advisers improved. A notable example is Afanasy Ordin-Nashchokin who, in many ways, represented the emergence of a new breed of politician who rose through talent rather than the happenstance of birth. Coming from the lowliest of noble origins, he distinguished himself as a diplomat (it is hard to name a truce in which he was not involved), soldier (he served with distinction in the Russo-Swedish War of 1656-58) and putter-down of rebellions.

Ordin-Nashchokin was not just a doer, but also a thinker: his addiction to foreign literature was legendary. He did very well for himself, despite being looked down upon by the established elite, and was greatly valued by Alexis. Of course, as always seemed to happen in Romanov history, he eventually fell from favour and headed to a monastery, where he lived out the remainder of his mostly blameless life. Still, his ascendancy can be seen as a move towards a changing of the guard within the Russian political system and a harbinger of things to come.

Historians sometimes refer to 1645, the year of Alexis's accession, as the date of birth of "modern Russia". This is to overstate matters, but it was certainly a turning point. Above all, the tsar had utter confidence in his divine right to rule and his unwavering ability to carry out the task. As an inscription on an elaborate new throne put it, he was "the most invincible and powerful emperor Alexis of Muscovy". It was a brave Muscovite who dared to disagree.

ALEXIS AND ENGLAND

How the English Civil War shaped Russia


Charles I, whose execution did great damage to Anglo-Russian relations during Alexis's reign

For centuries, relations between England and Russia had been all but nonexistent, but everything changed with the arrival of the Muscovy Company in the 1550s. Daring journeys took merchant-adventurers such as Richard Chancellor all the way to Moscow. Cultural links, diplomatic connections and economic ties rapidly developed, while special trading relations between England and Muscovy were established.

Up to the late 1570s, no flies were to be found in the ointment, but problems began to emerge. Boris Godunov, for example, was not a great fan of the English. Nonetheless, by the time of Alexis's rule, trade was still ticking along at a steady pace. Then, however, came the English Civil War and a sense of camaraderie between monarchs trumped economic interests.

In 1646, Alexis suspended the special rights afforded to English merchants in regard to avoiding customs duties - he was convinced that the Muscovy Company had sided with the Parliamentarian enemies of Charles I. The execution of the king a few years later led to the mass expulsion of English merchants from Russia, though they were still allowed to visit the port of Archangel. Here, to be sure, was a 17th-century example of what we now refer to as an international incident.

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FEODOR III

AN ENLIGHTENED RULER

The short but eventful reign of Feodor III was a watershed era in Russia's encounter with the simmering intellectual and cultural trends of the late 17th century

Words **Jon Wright**

Feodor III could not, by any means, be regarded as a dynamic tsar, but his reign witnessed developments that would help define Russia's intellectual and cultural identity throughout the 18th century. Only 15 when he came to power, Feodor was always reliant upon, and sometimes prey to, his advisers: at first Artamon Matveyev (who, as a result of his embezzling and his questioning of Feodor's suitability to rule, was quickly exiled for his sins) and then by members of Feodor's maternal family.

Nonetheless, Feodor appears to have possessed an exceptional intellect, brought to fruition during his youth by the forward-thinking monk Simeon Polotsky, a man who helped to lay the groundwork for Russia's encounter with Western ideas. Any account of Russia's version of Enlightenment places Polotsky - dramatist, poet, elegant preacher and champion of the study of Latin - at centre stage.

Polotsky had won the favour of Feodor's father, Alexis, and he was invited to Moscow to oversee young Feodor's education. Feodor proved to be an able student, mastering Latin and Polish and sampling a host of other subjects. The 18th century is usually seen as the period during which Russia embraced, albeit cautiously, the fashionable philosophical and cultural ideas brewing in the salons of the cities to the west, but the process began much earlier, and the ill-fated Feodor exemplified the trend.

Regrettably, Feodor's physical frailties always limited his ability to rule. An early childhood illness - most likely scurvy - left him disfigured and partially paralysed. He was frequently bed-ridden and even had to be carried to his father's funeral on a stretcher. But, in one historian's phrase, he was "a prince weak in body but strong in mind". His court appears to have been a vibrant, even jolly place, brimful of Polish influences, Western costume and the circulation of modish ideas.

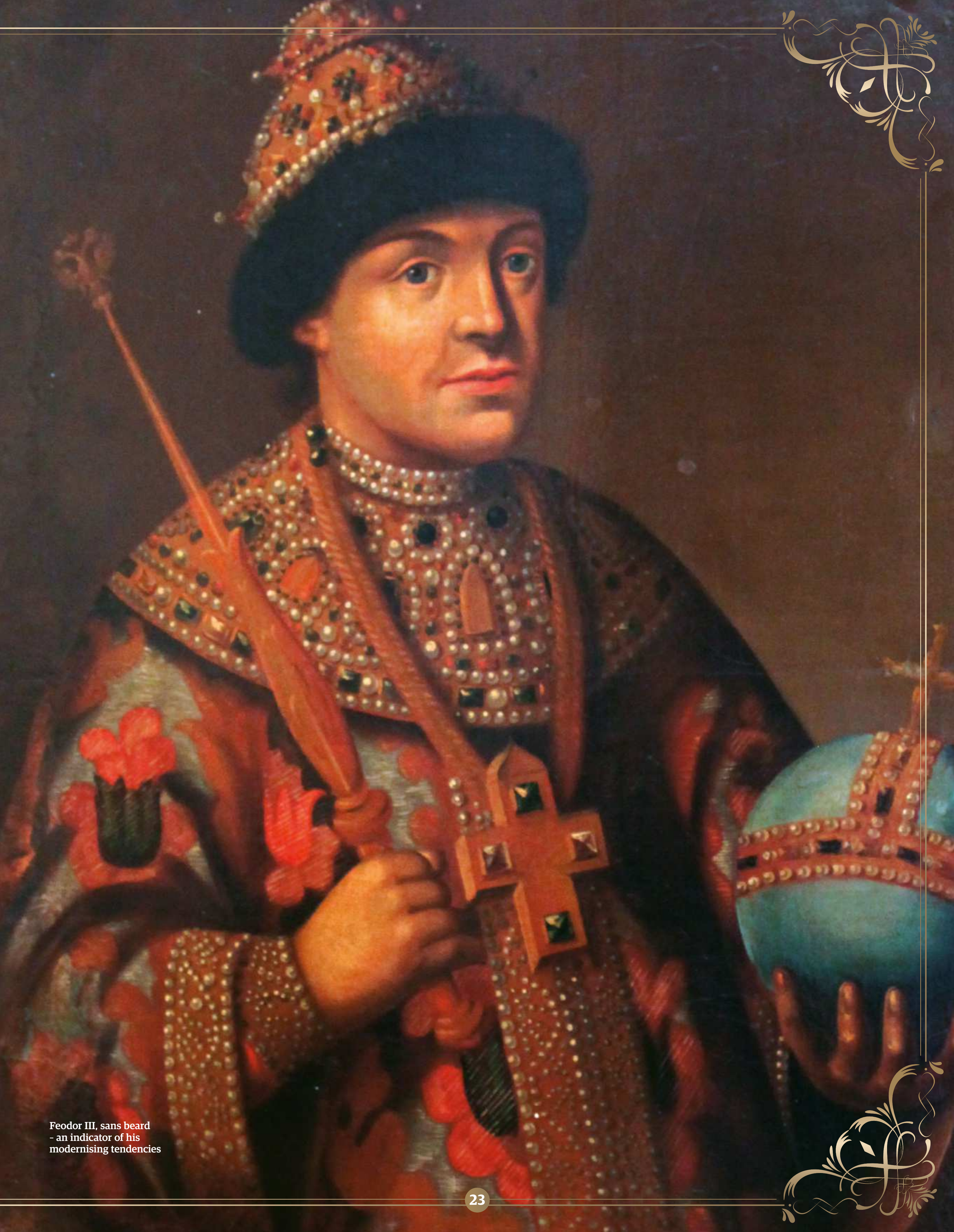
However, Feodor's rule did not lack its ruthless moments, and the usual chaotic round of diplomatic and military adventures and misadventures continued: scraps and then accords with Poland, a conflict with Turkey, and so forth. But a reformist trend can readily be discerned. Russia's convoluted and draconian penal codes were enforced with rather less vigour - there was, for instance, to be no more maiming and a thief would now be packed off to Siberia rather than having his hands severed.

In league with like-minded friends such as Ivan Yazykov, Feodor would seek to streamline aspects of Russia's bureaucracy, such as taxation, and embark upon a wide-ranging survey of land boundaries. With the Romanovs now firmly entrenched, there was more time to deal with the nuts and bolts of government.

And, perhaps most significantly, the system of 'place priority' (Mestnichestvo) was abandoned. Since the 15th century this code had determined the roles people could expect to play in politics and the military. Essentially, positions were assigned according to the antiquity of one's aristocratic lineage. On some levels, this only had trivial consequences - a better seat at a courtly feast, for example - but it also meant that rather too frequently, incompetent men were appointed to crucial offices and talented men were excluded. Largely through the influence of Vasily Golitsyn, the tsar formally abolished this archaic pecking order in 1682. A hugely symbolic act was the burning of previously treasured genealogical books and tables. It is worth noting, however, that while removed in legal terms, there would still be many a boyar who tried to sustain the old ways in the decades to come.

Feodor's reign also saw continued attempts to centralise government, enact military improvements and to limit the influence of the Church in political matters, but it was perhaps most memorable for its intellectual achievements. The crowning glory in this regard was the establishment of the Greek-Latin Academy at the Zaikonospassky monastery, which represented the culmination of trends stemming from the union of Ukraine and Russia. Forward-thinking monks began to flood in from Kiev, bringing new ideas with them.

Under the leadership of two Greek brothers, Ioannikios and Sophronius Likhud, an adventurous curriculum that included the seven liberal arts and the study of various languages was offered to students. The Likhud brothers were, in many ways, the quintessence of the intersection between eastern and western European scholarship during the 17th century - from their Cephalonian homeland they had travelled widely during



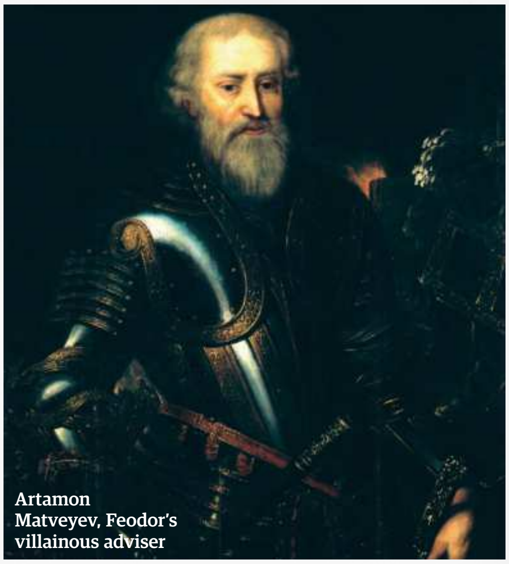
Feodor III, sans beard – an indicator of his modernising tendencies

A monument to the Likhud brothers who helped to found the Greek-Latin Academy

their studies (including a stint at the glamorous university in Padua), and produced textbooks on subjects as wide-ranging as logic, physics and philosophy. For all that, disputes continued to rage within the Russian intellectual elite and the brothers were eventually relieved of their duties at the Academy because of a perceived over-fondness for Latin. Still, the institution, initially under the leadership of men trained by the brothers, would continue to play a key role in Russia's intellectual life for the foreseeable future.

The tensions resulting from this influx of new ideas should not, however, be underestimated. For one, fierce squabbles arose over the issue of whether Greek or Latin influences should be given primacy. Secondly, a cultural conservative backlash swiftly made its presence felt. Some delighted in the arrival of the latest polyphonic music from the West, while others were appalled. Some were keen on absorbing the latest developments in Western art and others refused to do so - though the latter tendency did, in fact, lend new energy to the proud tradition of Russian icon painting. It all added up to a fascinating cultural crucible.

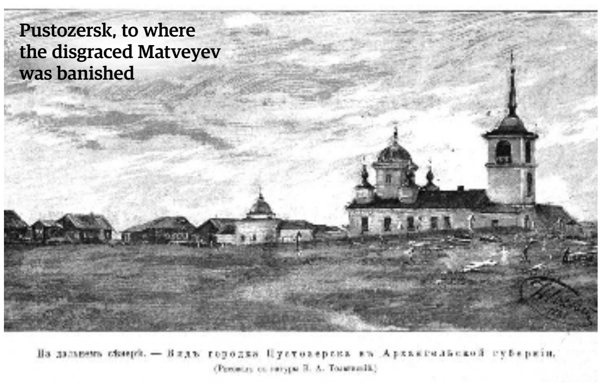
The final years of Feodor's life were a mixture of happiness and tragedy. In July 1680, he took a wife, Agafya Semyonovna Grushetskaya. The story goes that Feodor first saw her during a procession on Palm Sunday and was instantly besotted. His advisers did not favour the match so instead the old tradition of a bridal parade was arranged, with six of the fairest and most eligible maidens in the land placed on display. Feodor refused to make a choice and, in time, his wish to be married to Agafya was granted. She was an equal to her new husband when it came to progressive thinking. She had been well tutored in Latin, French and Polish, was an accomplished player of the harpsichord,



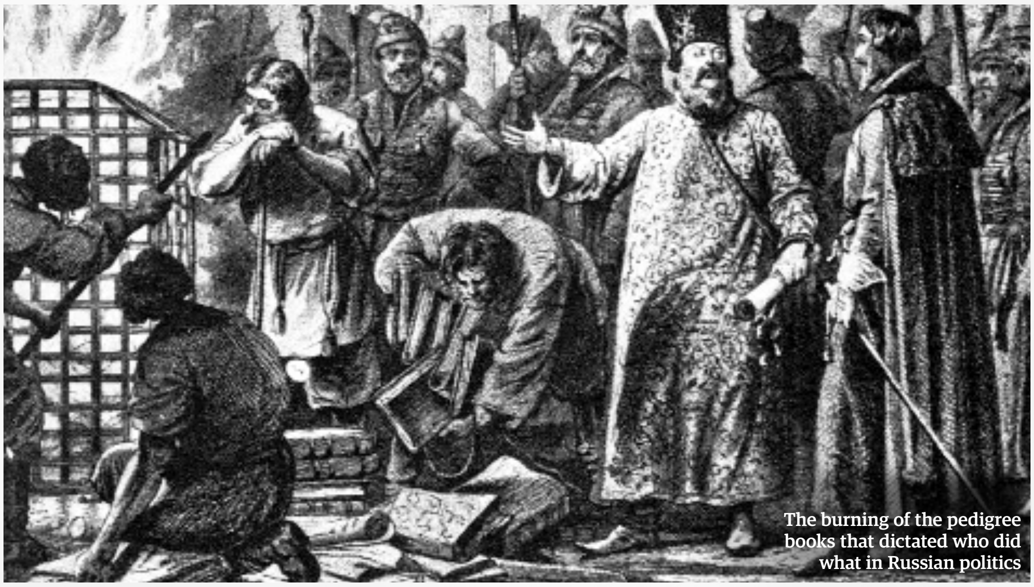
Artamon Matveyev, Feodor's villainous adviser

A ROLLERCOASTER Ups and downs of serving

Serving the Romanovs could result in a decidedly precarious career and Artamon Matveyev provides a good example of the ups and downs that sometimes had to be endured. Matveyev was a firm friend and adviser of Feodor's father, Alexis, and became accomplished in the arts of soldiering, court politics and diplomacy. He was also one of the keenest advocates of union with the Ukraine and his passion for reaching out to the wider world was exhibited by his interest in science and his famously extensive library. Unfortunately, Matveyev was not a fan of Feodor, regarding the new tsar's physical ailments as an insuperable obstacle. He attempted to have Peter rule instead but his plans were stymied and an infuriated Feodor banished him to chilly Pustozersk. The political wheel was apt to turn, of course, and one of Peter the Great's first actions as tsar was to summon Matveyev back to court. Sad to say, those who opposed Peter swiftly struck at his allies and, before too long, Matveyev had been assassinated in bloody fashion.


На дальнемъ сѣверѣ. — Видъ городка Пустозерска въ Архангельской губерніи.

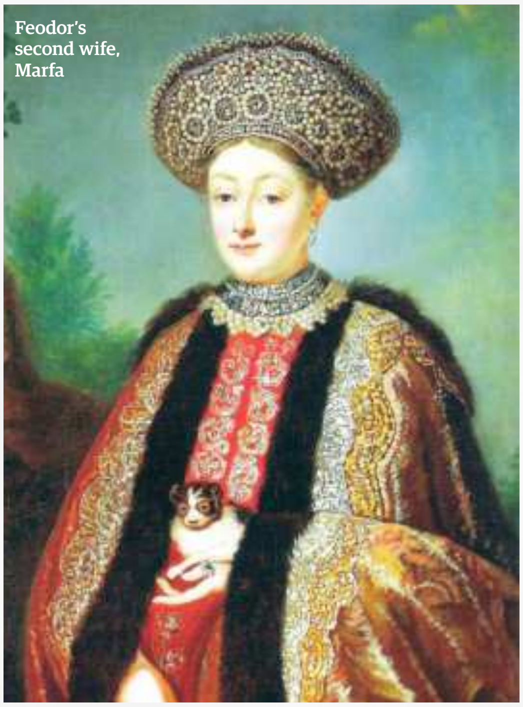
Pustozersk, to where the disgraced Matveyev was banished



The burning of the pedigree books that dictated who did what in Russian politics

The Zaikonospassky Monastery, home to the innovative academy founded by Feodor

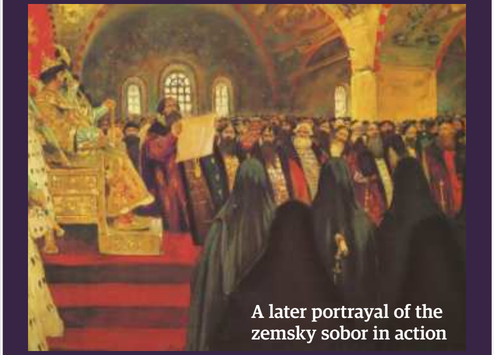
A.Savin, Wikimedia Commons



Feodor's second wife, Marfa

THE CORRIDORS OF POWER

Who and what were the zemsky sobor?



A later portrayal of the zemsky sobor in action

One of the defining features of the Romanovs' rise to greatness was a desire to monopolise power. This, inevitably, disrupted the political status quo. Since the mid-16th century, the zemsky sobor (a parliament of sorts) had wielded some influence in state affairs. It was comprised of three groups, representing the nobility, the clergy and the third estate. It was usually assembled at the tsar's request and his wishes were always made abundantly clear. As such, the body's room for manoeuvre was always limited, and this was hardly a model of open constitutional government.

When, on rare occasion, the body challenged the tsar's plans, sparks were apt to fly, but the zemsky sobor could sometimes play a significant role. It is telling that, during the Romanovs' early, insecure years, the zemsky sobor was frequently pressed into service.

By the time of Feodor's reign, however, the institution had all but vanished from the political landscape: an assembly had not been called for almost 30 years. A brief swan song was permitted under Feodor - to push through some of his foreign and domestic policies - but the era of Romanov despotism had most certainly arrived.

> "DESPERATE TO SECURE AN HEIR, FEODOR ACQUIRED A NEW BRIDE"

and supported the idea that Russian men should be allowed to shave their beards.

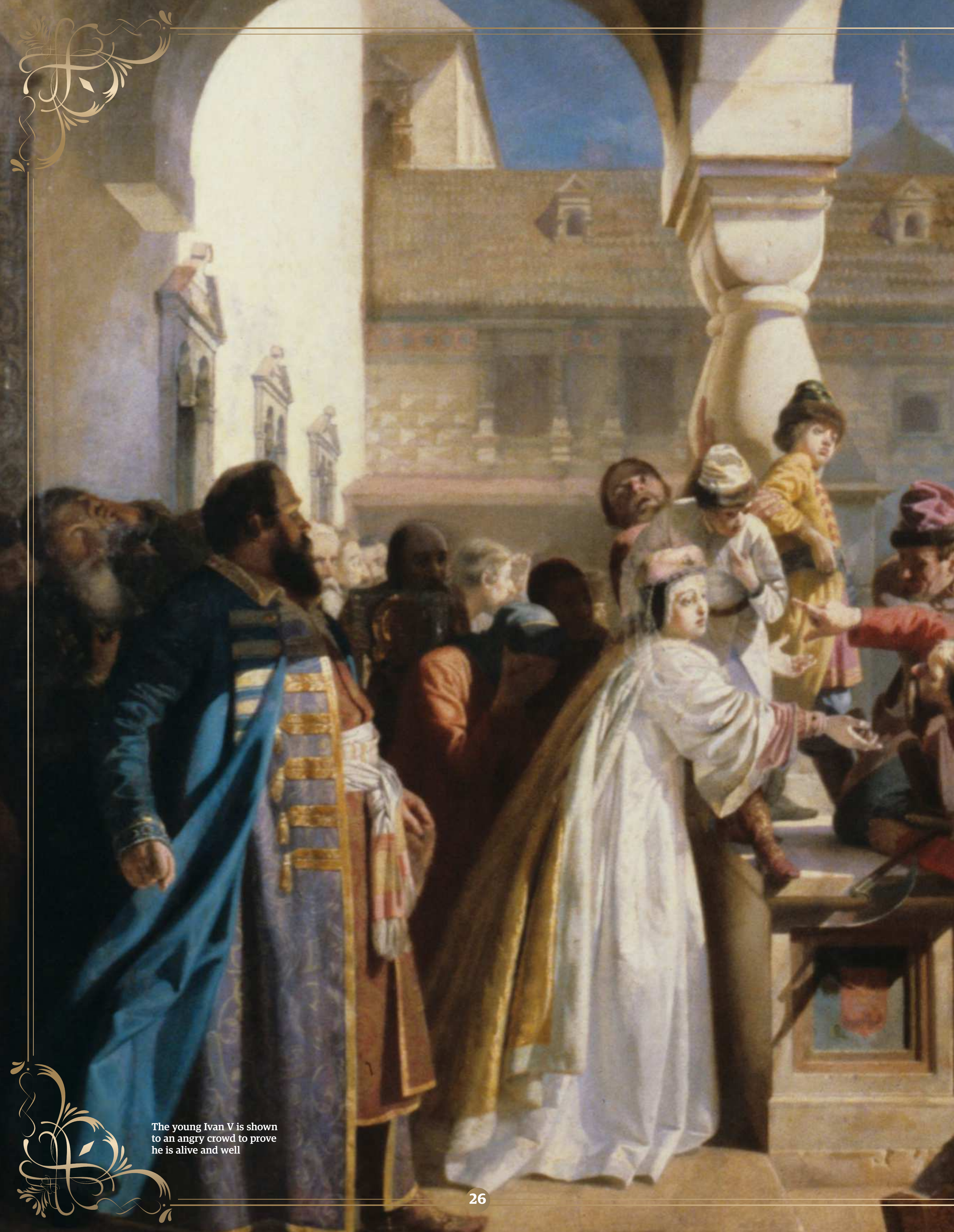
At the time this was a highly controversial issue. Traditionally, the growing of a beard had been regarded as a crucial symbol of manhood in Russian culture - a means, as it were, of masculine self-fashioning. Rules and regulations even existed to punish anyone who did damage to another man's beard and, theologically, the lack of a beard could even be regarded as a sin.

The promotion of a right to shave can be seen as one of the markers of Russia's attempt to embrace new ideas and while Peter the Great and his famous beard tax tend to receive most of the attention, it is notable that Agafya and her husband were early supporters of the cause. Portraits of Feodor often show him clean-shaven. In addition, while women at the Russian court had usually been isolated in separate quarters, Agafya was unusual in that she frequently appeared next to her husband in public.

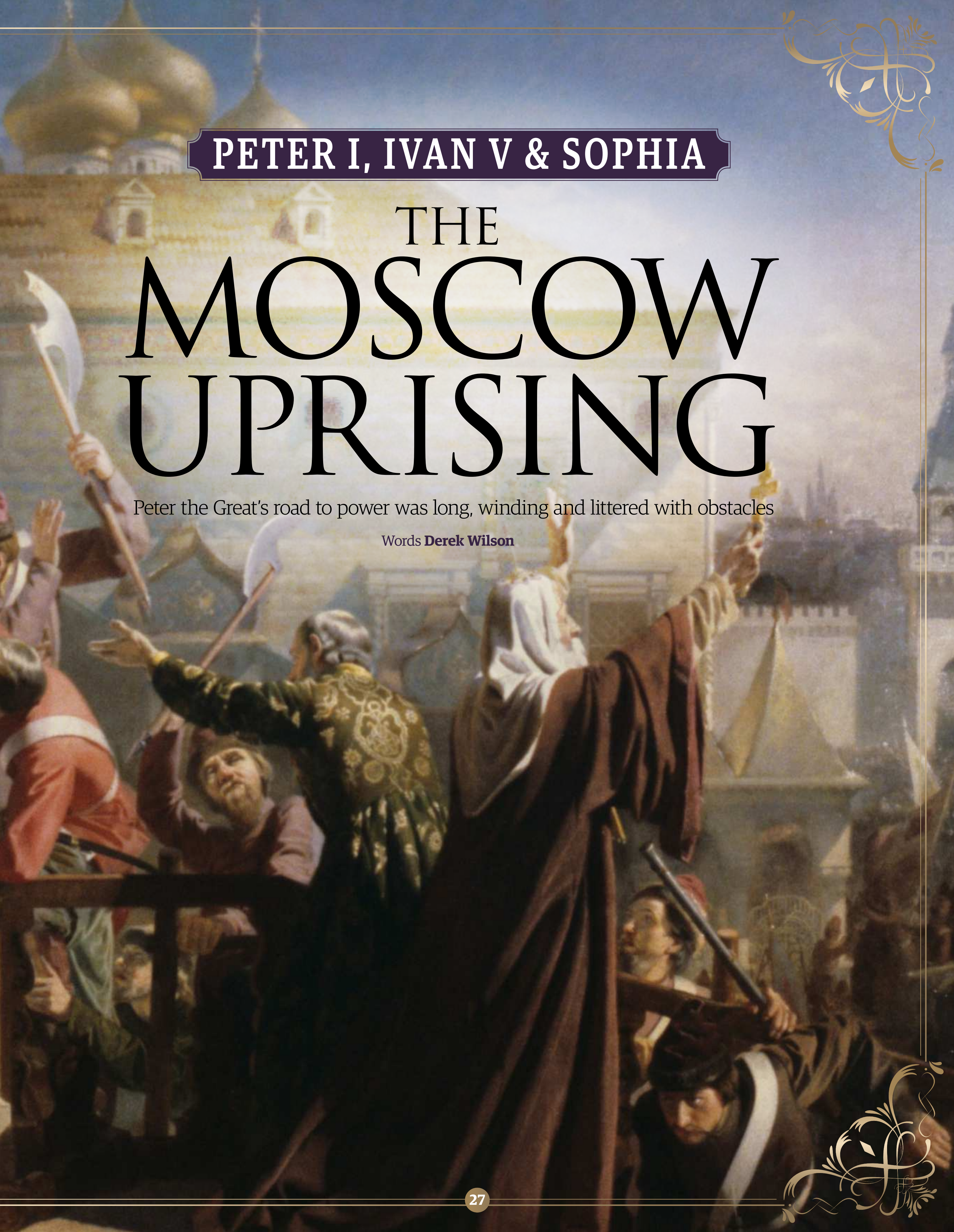
The couple were blessed with the arrival of a child, Ilya, in 1681. Sadly, Agafya died a few days later and the infant passed away a week after that. Still desperate to secure an heir, Feodor acquired a new bride, Marfa Apraksina, but went the way of all flesh within three months. Given his physical ills and his capacity to be dominated by his counsellors, it is unlikely that Feodor would have emerged as one of Russia's greatest tsars if he had he lived longer. Still, it is a great shame that his reign is usually dismissed as little more than a muted overture to the arrival of Peter the Great.

In surveys of Russian history, Feodor is often lucky to be granted a paragraph or two, but his role in bringing new ideas to his land and pushing a cautious process of reform should not be underestimated. The extent to which he did this of his own volition and how far he was steered by others remains unclear, but the results were the same in either case. But Feodor did, of course, make one final mistake in neglecting to name an heir and so, upon his death, a dynastic horse race between his brother Ivan and his step-brother Peter got underway. It did not take very long for the result to be decided.

© Getty; Alamy



The young Ivan V is shown to an angry crowd to prove he is alive and well



PETER I, IVAN V & SOPHIA

THE MOSCOW UPRISING

Peter the Great's road to power was long, winding and littered with obstacles

Words **Derek Wilson**

The tsar of Russia was an autocrat but, in practice, he had to rely on the support of the leading boyar families. Inevitably, they spent much of their time jockeying for power and influence. Another potentially influential group was the streltsy, a part-time regiment of musketeers drawn from the merchant class, who formed the palace guard. Their loyalty was vital to the tsar and this gave them considerable bargaining power. Effective government, therefore, was in large measure a matter of balancing the interests of all these political components. Tsar Alexis Mikhailovich's long reign from 1645 to 1676 indicates that he was a skilful political manipulator. One of his tactics was his promotion of a personal favourite to the top position in the civil service. Artamon Matveyev was a highly efficient administrator and diplomat who also happened to be the captain of Alexis's personal bodyguard. The situation, from the tsar's point of view, was fairly satisfactory. But he did have one problem that worried him increasingly as he grew older - the succession.

“IN THE HOPE OF PRODUCING A BETTER HEIR, ALEXIS REMARRIED”

Alexis's wife had given birth to only three children who survived into adulthood - a girl, Sophia, and two boys, Feodor and Ivan. Both the tsar's sons enjoyed poor health. Feodor was described as “very unhealthy and melancholic” and Ivan as “humpbacked and nearly blind”. Therefore, there was a prospect of weak rule and manipulation of a future sovereign by rival factions. In the hope of producing a better heir, Alexis remarried. His 17-year-old bride, Natalya Naryshkina, from one of the non-boyar clans, soon presented him with a healthy son, who grew to be remarkably tall. He was born in 1672 and christened Peter. Five years after this healthy son's birth, Alexis died and, inevitably, boyar loyalties were divided between supporters of the late tsar's various children. The result would be 13 years of strife, rebellion and bitter bloodshed.

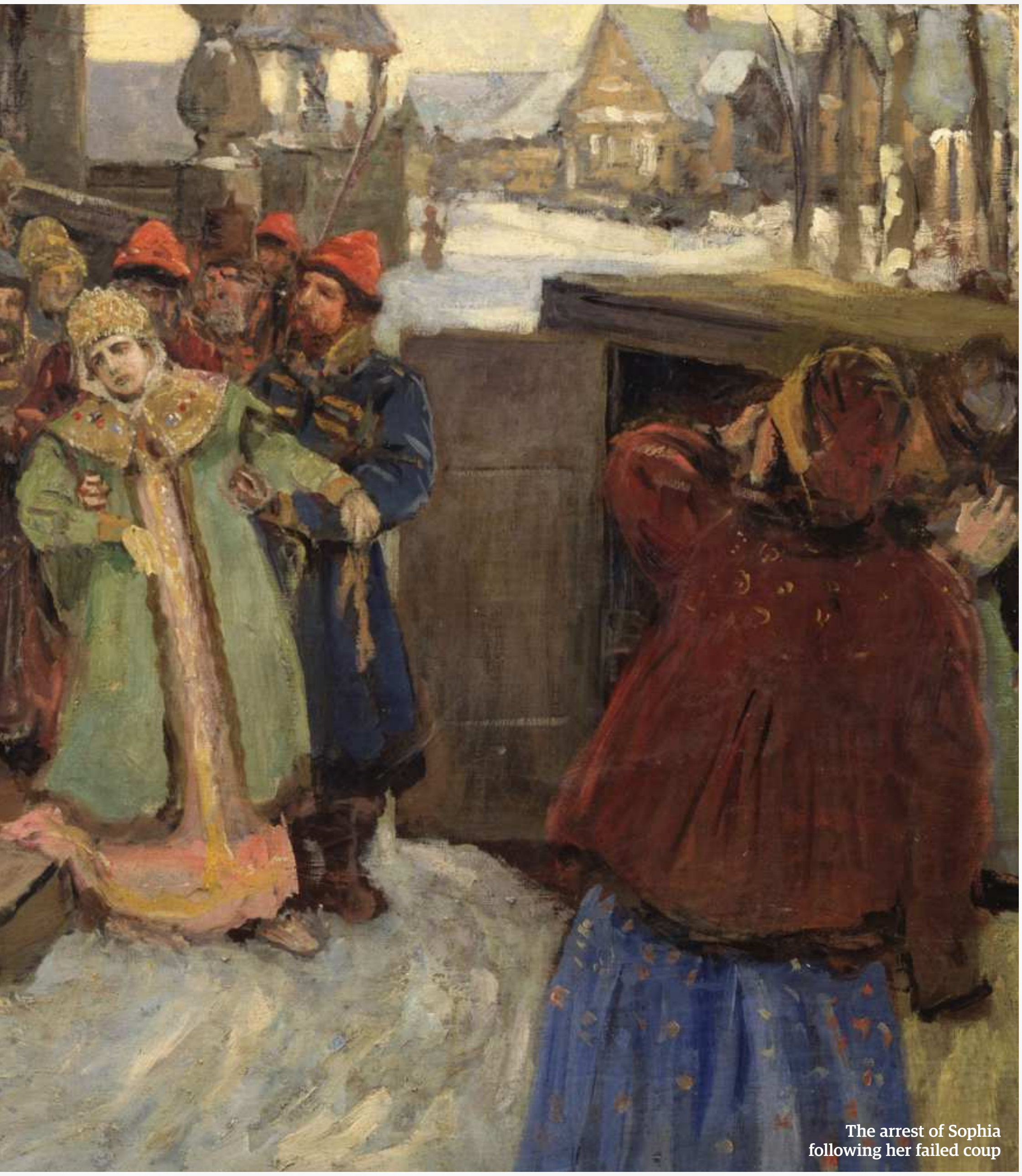
Matveyev had thrown his weight behind the Naryshkins during Alexis's last years, and his support was invaluable. He used his position to remove the relatives of the late tsarina, the Miloslavskys, from Moscow, and appointed them to positions in distant regions. Other boyars were also dismissed from high office in favour of men of lower rank who owed their positions to the favourite. Natalya's relatives were, of course, among those brought to the Kremlin and given important jobs. Her father was also raised to boyar status. But Matveyev's enemies kept a close eye on him and used every stratagem to hamper his attempt to build up a ‘party’. Natalya and her young son were seldom out of danger. The majority of the boyars resented her because of her humble origins and her connection with Matveyev, but the more conservative among them had other, personal grievances. They thought her an ambitious, ‘liberated’ woman, contaminated by foreign influences. She had spent some of her impressionable teenage years in Smolensk, where her father held a military post, and had come into close contact with the despised Catholic Poles. She lacked the submissive, unthinking respect for ancient institutions that was expected of Russian women. Her open-mindedness communicated itself to Peter during his early years, when mother and son were thrown especially close together by shared adversity.

Their fate became even worse as soon as Alexis died. One of the first acts of the new tsar, Feodor, was to recall and reinstate members of his mother's family, the Miloslavskys. Matveyev was dispatched into exile at Pustozersk in the treeless wastes of the Siberian Tundra, 3,000 kilometres from Moscow. Prominent members of Natalya's family were also ordered away from the capital and placed under virtual house arrest. When, after a reign of just over six years, Feodor died in 1682, the boyar council, faced with a choice between the mentally handicapped Ivan and his healthy half-brother Peter, voted to make the younger boy their tsar. The Naryshkins were triumphant, but they had not reckoned with Alexis's eldest child, Sophia. She was determined to keep her family, the Miloslavskys, on top. One contemporary said of her, “Her mind is as sharp, subtle and political as her figure is broad, short and gross.” Certainly, she set her mind to destroying the power of the Naryshkins.

One resident diplomat described the tense situation in these words: “Between the two tsars there is great jealousy. The younger has the greatest following, especially among the nobility, although the older has given the nobility great gifts and favour and lets everything be governed by his sister… Most people are of the opinion that the younger tsar would separate from the elder and easily get the government alone. A few weeks ago various writings were found in the tsar's [Peter's] apartments in which, among other things, it was stated that the princess would keep the government to herself and the older tsar would go to a monastery, in which also the lord Miloslavsky and others who support the older tsar were threatened, and for this reason a great investigation was done to find out whence these came.”

Sophia began to adopt an increasingly authoritarian pose. In royal decrees she coupled

A gold coin with the profile of the regent Sophia



The arrest of Sophia following her failed coup

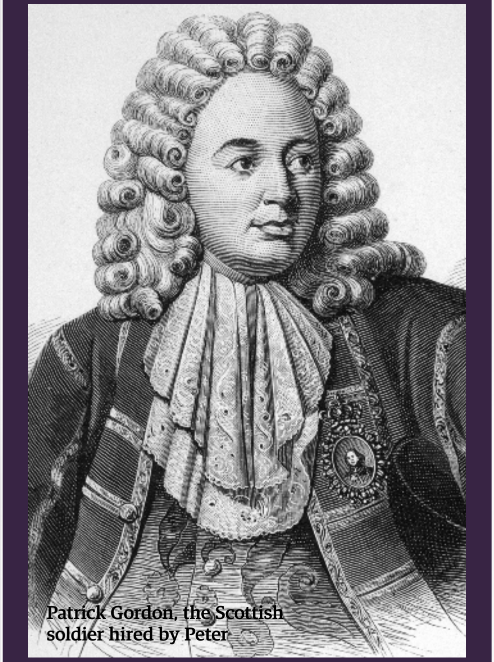
her name with those of the tsars. For the time being she could rule in the name of her brother, but the likelihood of his living a long life was remote, and without him she would have to face down Peter's supporters. Success would depend on her ability to build and maintain a secure power base.

At this point the political situation was complicated by malcontents among the streltsy. They were protesting about pay and conditions, but soon their anger turned on the Naryshkins. It was a situation Sophia could - and did - manipulate. As tensions in Moscow rose, with bands of disaffected soldiers swaggering through the streets, she began spreading rumours that were deliberately intended to inflame the situation. According to the stories, the Naryshkins were strutting about the palace as though they owned it - one even had the temerity to sit on the royal throne - and Ivan had been attacked. On 15 May, an angry musketeer mob appeared before the palace demanding to know that Ivan was safe. Natalya brought Ivan and Peter out to the top of the steps. That did not satisfy the rebels. Their leaders now wanted a conference with boyar leaders to discuss a long list of grievances. Principally they required Ivan to be made tsar and the Matveyev-Naryshkin caucus to be exterminated. The streltsy had become a violent armed force doing the bidding of Sophia and her favourite, Vasily Golitsyn. The situation was approaching flashpoint when Matveyev appeared, accompanied by Michael Dolgoruki, one of Golitsyn's enemies. With a roar, angry soldiers dragged them away from the royal party and threw them down the stairs into the courtyard where they were hacked to pieces by the streltsy mob.

The bloodletting continued for three days. Bands of soldiers rampaged through the capital

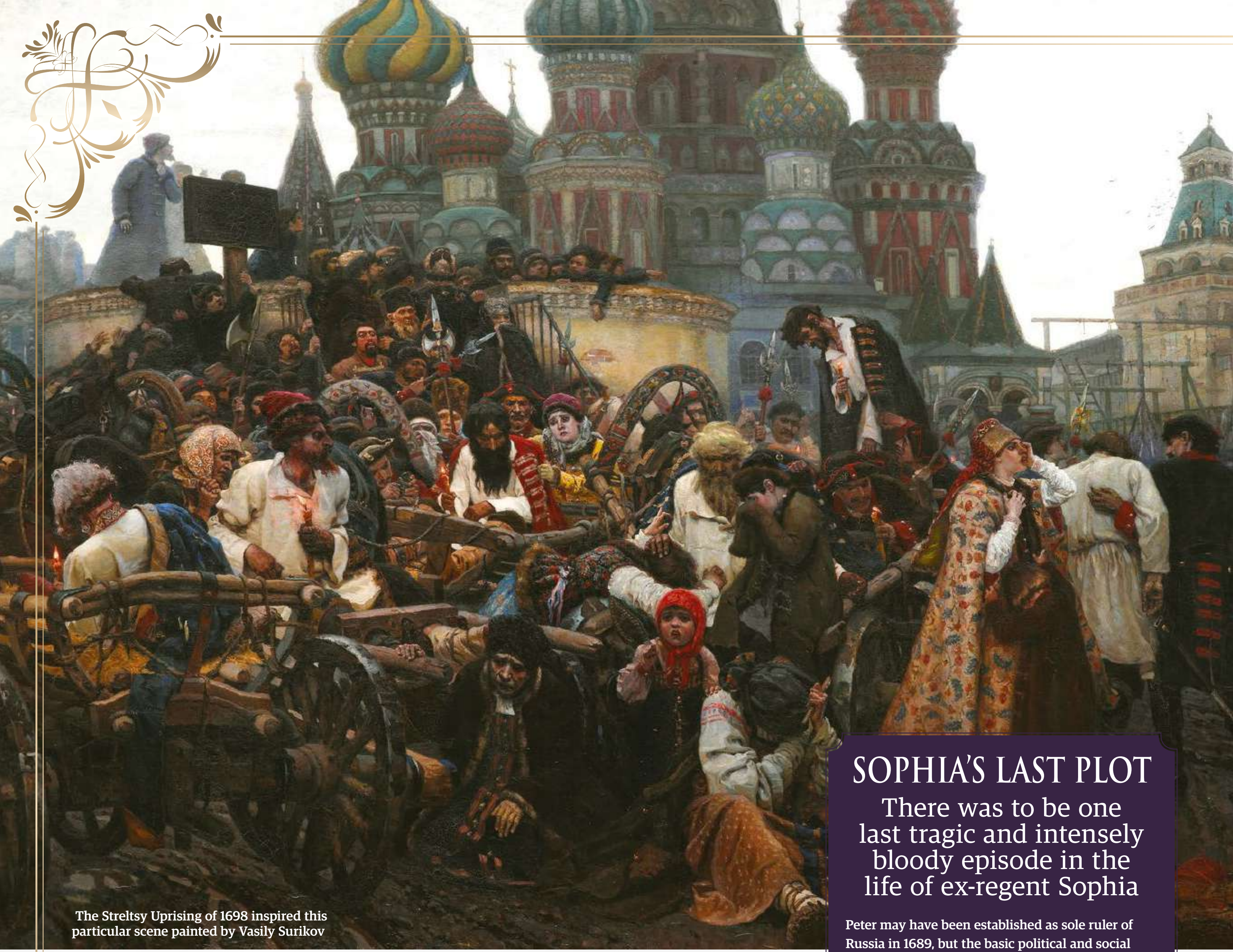
PLAYING AT SOLDIERS BECOMES DEADLY SERIOUS

Peter's development of a modern army and navy began when he was little more than a child



Patrick Gordon, the Scottish soldier hired by Peter

Peter was only ten years old when Sophia made her grab for power, and throughout his early teenage years he was happy to leave the stuffy Kremlin and the business of government in the hands of grown-ups. He enjoyed escaping with his friends to Preobrazhenskoe, on the outskirts of Moscow, and indulging his own passions. Most of his time was spent on what most observers thought to be military games, but which formed the basis of something much more important. Not just him playing with pretend soldiers, Peter formed his own little regiments - the Preobrazhensky and the Semenovsky - composed of local young men and the sons of courtiers. They had uniforms, ranks and training methods, all based on the latest innovations in Western military techniques. The two regiments had their own barracks and their own fort. As military adviser Peter hired Patrick Gordon, a Scottish soldier of fortune who had served his father. Between them they built what was, in effect, a private army. Later Peter's imitation regiments became major fighting units in his real wars. A modern navy also grew out of his youthful games. He discovered an old dinghy and learned to sail it. From this grew his love of ships. The boy who had the authority and the resources to become a warlord in his own miniature military state morphed easily into the tyrannical ruler of an advanced military dictatorship.



The Streltsy Uprising of 1698 inspired this particular scene painted by Vasily Surikov

and its environs, hunting down men they believed to be their enemies and carrying out summary executions. Peter lost several relatives in the rebellion and shared his mother's fear and anguish.

Sophia also knew that the chaos had gone on long enough. She had not got rid of the Naryshkins simply to put the streltsy in command. She masterminded a compromise: Ivan and Peter were to be joint tsars, and she would act as regent until they came of age. Having achieved that, she dealt with the rebellious musketeers. She summoned their leader to a meeting. As soon as he arrived, he was killed. Sophia had gained complete control, and for seven years she was the effective ruler of Russia. But the trauma of 1682 had left deep emotional scars on Peter. He entered his teens determined that the power game was not over.

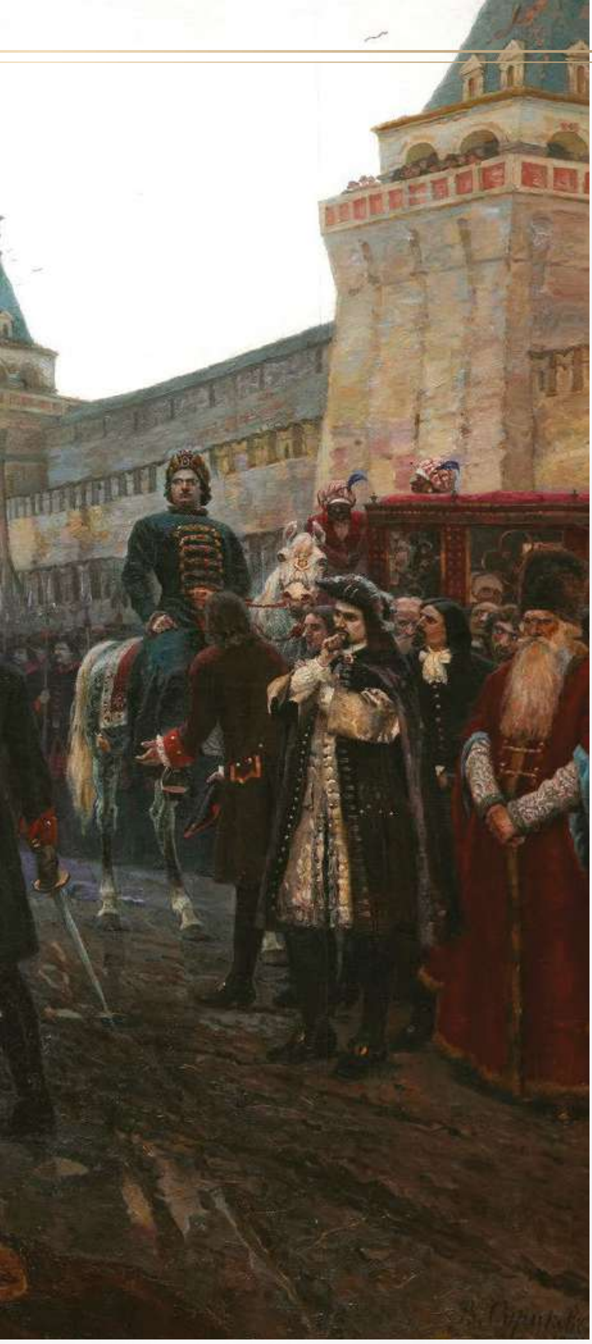
He spent much of his time at Kokui, a settlement outside Moscow designated for foreign diplomats, merchants and military advisers. The young tsar quickly discovered how backward his nation was in terms of modern scientific development – particularly as it affected warfare. In the alternative court he established, away from stifling, tradition-bound Moscow, he created his own army regiments and had them trained in the use of the latest military weapons developed in Western Europe. He travelled the thousand kilometres to the port of Archangel to see for himself the large ocean-going foreign ships that brought merchandise to his largely landlocked country. Steadily he developed the ambition of making Russia a world power, on a par with the nations of Western Europe. Peter's fertile brain teamed with ideas and plans that, to government officials back in Moscow, seemed to be radical fancies. But there was nothing foolish about what Peter had in mind, which was nothing less than taking complete control of Muscovy and making it into a state able to take its place among the world's leading nations.

The young tsar's preoccupation with such activities suited Sophia and Golitsyn well. Their political situation was essentially insecure. Peter was popular with the nation's elite, and becoming steadily more so. Their own power base was the Miloslavsky network, the more reactionary boyars and church leaders and the streltsy. They desperately needed the disabled Tsar Ivan to marry

SOPHIA'S LAST PLOT

There was to be one last tragic and intensely bloody episode in the life of ex-regent Sophia

Peter may have been established as sole ruler of Russia in 1689, but the basic political and social problems facing the country had not been resolved. They came to a head again seven years later. Once again the streltsy were at the heart of the problem – as well as Sophia. The tsar had rushed headlong into a range of radical changes in internal and foreign policy. One result was to unite in opposition traditionalist elements in the church, the military and among the boyar families. The streltsy thought themselves particularly ill-used. They had specific concerns about pay and conditions, but were basically feeling marginalised because Peter was imposing military reforms on them and appointing foreign experts to command positions. In the summer of 1698, while Peter was absent on a European tour, some of the malcontents made contact with boyar and ecclesiastical sympathisers – and with Sophia. They proposed to reinstate her and depose Peter. They set out for Moscow and were only narrowly defeated by loyalist troops. Some of the mutineers were executed, and 1,845 were imprisoned. This was not enough for Peter. He hurried home and presided personally over an investigation. Hundreds died of the results of barbaric torture and 1,200 were executed. The tsar had several bodies hung outside Sophia's window at the nunnery. She herself was condemned to solitary confinement, in which she spent her last six years.



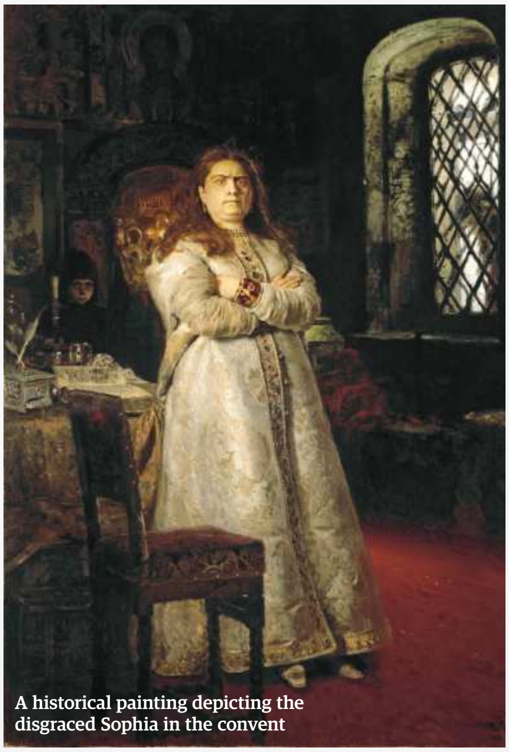
and sire an heir but, when a reluctant bride was found, she gave birth, between 1689 and 1694, to five children - all girls. Sophia was running out of young royals through whom she could continue to reign. Her government was also becoming unpopular. Golitsyn, her chief minister, was far from incompetent, but he was responsible for military campaigns against the Crimean Turks in 1687 and 1689 which were disastrously costly in terms of money and lives. In 1689 Peter added to her problems by getting married. Increasingly Sophia faced the problem of being sidelined by a vigorous and popular young tsar with healthy heirs of his own. With her options fast running out, the regent resorted to intrigue and violence. Her first move, once again, was to spread false rumours about Peter and his family, particularly that the tsar was intent on disbanding the streltsy.

“PETER NOW CONSIGNED HIS HALF-SISTER TO A CONVENT”

In 1687 Sophia had toyed with the idea of having herself crowned as tsarina, but she could not muster sufficient backing. On 7 August 1689 she forced a showdown. She went under cover of darkness to Moscow's prestigious Donskoy monastery and issued orders to the streltsy to assemble there to defend her and Tsar Ivan from the 'treacherous Naryshkins'. The musketeers were divided, not clear who had the first call on their loyalty. Peter had already retired for the night when the news reached him, but he leaped from bed and, without stopping to get dressed, took horse and galloped to a vantage point in the nearby woods. Thither his servants followed him with suitable clothes, and having changed out of his nightshirt, the tsar rode at full speed to the Trinity monastery, some 20 kilometres northwest of Moscow.

Peter's mother and wife, along with other family members and leading boyar supporters, hastened to join him. The young tsar issued orders for the musketeers to rally to him at his headquarters. Sophia countermanded these instructions. For three weeks the standoff continued. More and more influential figures came to the tsar's camp, but the outcome was not a foregone conclusion. Although Peter was popular, the Naryshkins were not. Several of the boyars found the royal family overbearing and feared that handing power to them would simply be to exchange the frying pan for the fire. Thus, some of the nation's most influential men waited on events, particularly the outcome of negotiations between the parties. Sophia sent messengers to Trinity monastery to discuss a possible compromise. Peter did not respond, and eventually Sophia herself left Moscow for talks with her rival. Peter simply refused to see her and she was obliged to return, humiliated. Now, in this first political crisis of his life, the 17-year-old tsar revealed one of his strongest characteristics - stubbornness. He was essentially straightforward in his thinking and no scheming politique. When he had made up his mind on any course of action he paid little attention to counsel.

His determination paid off. As the days passed more and more of the streltsy came to his camp. Soon he was in a strong enough position to order any officers who had not done so to pledge their loyalty on pain of death. He also moved against the regent's main supporters. Golitsyn quickly submitted, and was probably lucky to escape with his life. He was stripped of noble rank and banished to the far north of the country, where he eventually died in obscurity. Fyodor Shaklovity, another of Sophia's intimates, was not so fortunate. His greatest crime was spreading rumours about the Naryshkins. Now they had their revenge, accusing him of plotting against Tsar Peter. The regent tried strenuously to protect her ally, but on 7 September she was forced to sacrifice him. Shaklovity was sent in chains to Trinity monastery. Four days later, after excruciating torture, he confessed to his 'crimes' and was executed. This was the end for Sophia. Peter now consigned his half-sister to a convent and purged the government of all her supporters. The seven-year struggle was over.



A historical painting depicting the disgraced Sophia in the convent

THE MAKING OF A TYRANT

Peter's early experiences turned him into an accomplished - but cruel - dictator

“He amuses himself by making his favourites play tug-o-war with each other and often they knock each other out in their efforts to pay court. In the winter he had large holes cut in the ice and makes the fattest lords pass over them in sleds. The weakness of the new ice often causes them to fall in and drown... but his dominant passion is to see houses burn...”

That was how a French visitor described the 20-year-old Tsar Peter. “The child is father to the man,” wrote Wordsworth, and the poet's words were certainly true of Peter. The horrors he had witnessed in his early years and the fears his insecurity had aroused marked him for life. He grew into a man of strong passions, violent temper and insensitivity to the feelings of others. A lesser man would have made a benign ruler. But a lesser man would not have achieved what Peter the Great achieved.

©Getty; Alamy;Topfoto

PETER I

THE GREAT TRANSFORMER

Peter I was the tsar who began the transformation of Muscovy into Russia

Words **Derek Wilson**

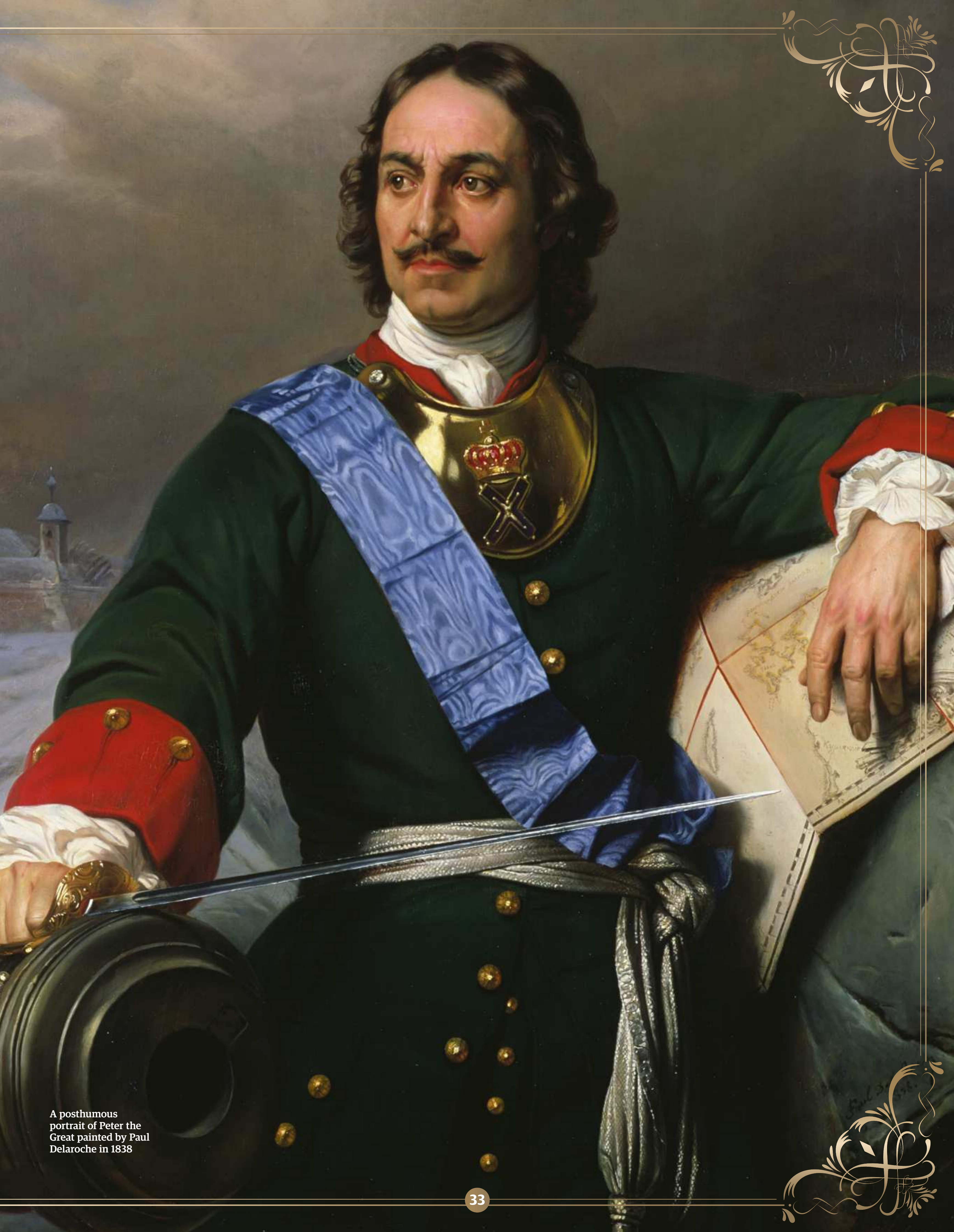
We cannot identify a fixed date on which Muscovy became Russia. The Rus were a loose federation of Slavic peoples who, in the Middle Ages, dominated a large territory from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The grand duchy of Muscovy, centred on Moscow, was one of the principalities of this federation. Its expansion began during the reigns of Ivan III and Ivan IV, also known as Ivan the Terrible, when Muscovy overran large areas of Rus territory. This success had its downside. Although the tsardom increased its tax-paying population and its natural resources, it also increased its administrative borders, not to mention the costs of military action. Despite its expansion, Russia suffered serious geo-economic restraints. Its only direct access to oceanic trade routes was via the White Sea in the far north, a waterway ice-bound for more than half the year. In any case, Russia had little to export in terms of high-value national products prized by other nations.

The nation's semi-isolation was particularly inauspicious because it coincided with the rapid intellectual and technical advances associated in western Europe with the Renaissance and the Reformation. Modernising tsars - and there were several - conscious of the need to close the gap between their country and the more advanced neighbouring states found themselves in a paradoxical situation. The political tradition guaranteed them autocratic power and the freedom to impose their own policies, but the mindset that governed policy-making was steeped in rigid conservatism. The tsars ruled in close collaboration with the leaders of the Russian Church, whose historic theology and liturgy had their roots in the Orthodox practices of Constantinople and who rejected Roman Catholicism and, by extension, Protestantism as heretical. Civil society was held together by the boyars, whose attitudes were similarly hidebound, and there was no entrepreneurial middle class of any consequence to champion economic change. The bedrock of society was serfdom. Peasant families were tied to the land and, like the land, were owned by their masters. Subservient to their lords, their priests and their tsars, there was little trace of the social dynamic that helped to power socio-economic change in the West. This was the rigid, stratified, conservative system that Peter I inherited.

There was much about it that he hated, and his childhood traumas must have had much to do with his rejection of what went on at the heart of the Muscovite regime. Yet, at the same time, he was able to use the absolutism that regime provided to enforce change. The tall joint tsar was very happy to leave stuffy court-and-church ritual to his half-brother while he spent time with his own companions, such as Westerners in the foreign quarter of Kokui or in his own alternative court which was an irreverent parody of the solemn, official, priest-dominated court at the Kremlin. The wild, orgiastic antics of Peter and his friends verged on the blasphemous. Yet his alternative court was no mere drinking club. The distinction between mock court and real court was blurred. Indeed, the two overlapped. Just as Peter's play regiments developed eventually into units of the Russian army, so the pseudo-governmental assemblies merged with the executive departments. Several of Peter's roistering friends held important posts in government. From the very beginning the tsar was determined to draw his advisers not from the families that expected to be involved in government, but from men he liked and trusted - men of all ranks, even foreigners.

Peter took his despising of rank and formality to extremes. He loathed the pomp and ceremony that inevitably went with his role as head of state. In his mind there was a distinction between the trappings of monarchy and the business of ruling. This was demonstrated most pointedly in later years when he built magnificent palaces to rival Versailles while preferring to live in a log cabin. In his 'pretend' court he did not play the role of prince. He was a mere acolyte in the train of the pretend tsar, which title was bestowed on one of his friends. When writing to his 'superiors', he would sign himself 'Archdeacon Peter'. This paralleled the subordination he affected in military and diplomatic affairs. In the army and navy he assumed minor officer rank, and when he and his entourage went on a grand European tour in 1697 he posed as an official in the train of one of his ambassadors. This was partly an expression of his love of acting but it had a more serious purpose.

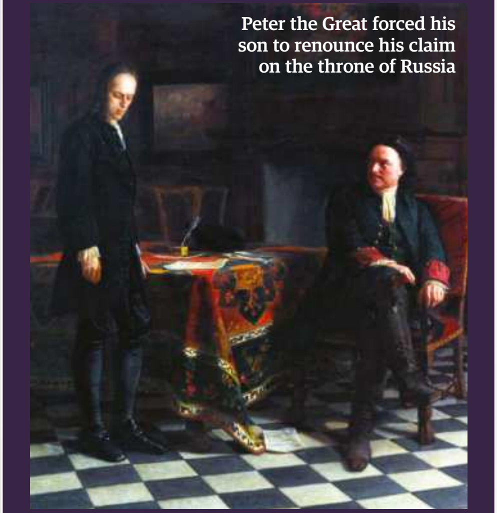
When visiting foreign countries he wanted to be free to travel at will, without the time- and energy-wasting business of official receptions,



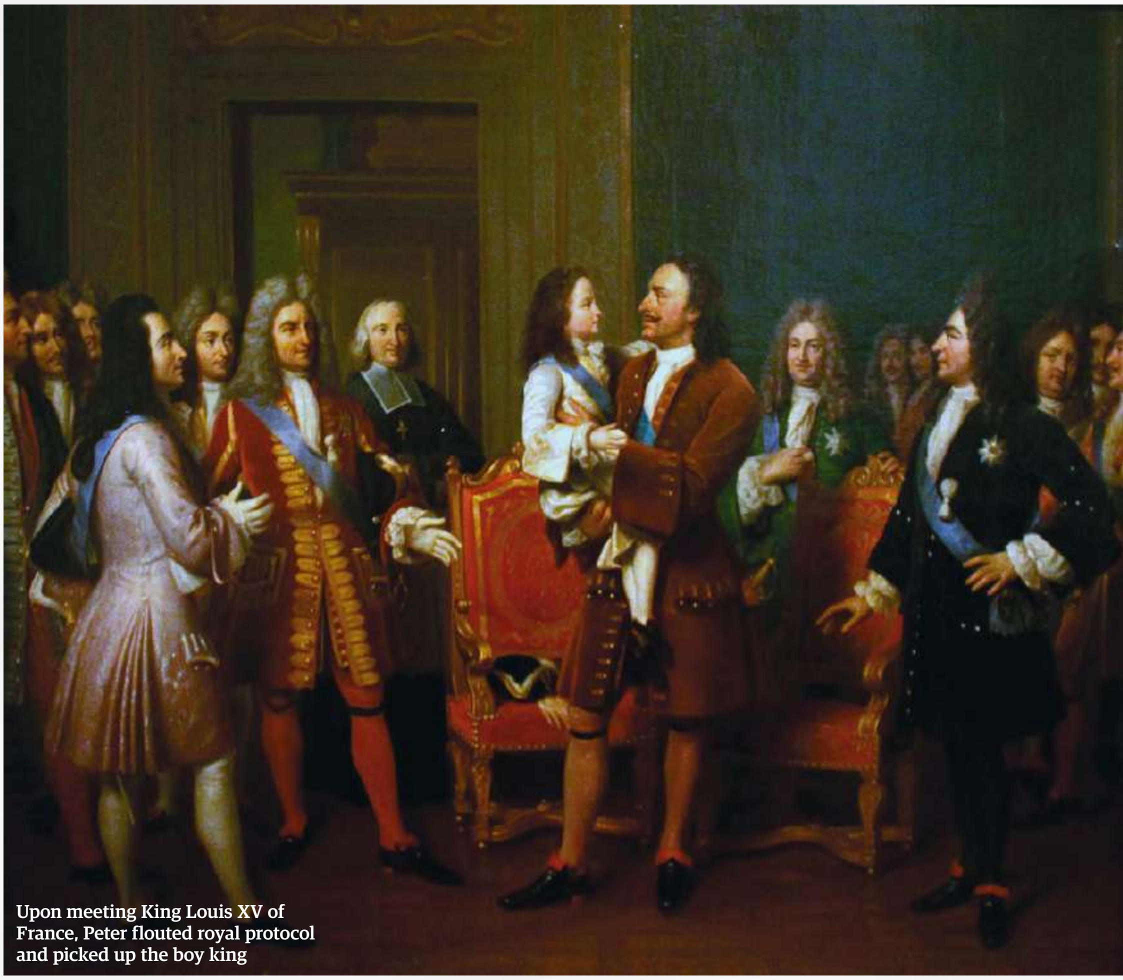
A posthumous portrait of Peter the Great painted by Paul Delaroche in 1838

THE TRAGEDY OF ALEXIS

Peter ignored his son – with appalling consequences


Peter the Great forced his son to renounce his claim on the throne of Russia

When, in 1698, Peter terminated his first marriage and sent his wife, Eudoxia, to a nunnery, he separated her from her eight-year-old son, Alexis. Had he taken the boy under his wing he might have trained him to be a worthy successor. Instead he showed his heir no affection and entrusted his upbringing to tutors. There was, therefore, an emotional void in Alexis's life, which left him open to the influence of conservative forces who hoped that, when he came to the throne, he would undo his father's reforms. Not until the boy was 12 did his father seek to inculcate in him his own policies and ideals. It was too late. Alexis lacked his father's energy and convictions and when he tried to follow instructions he was frequently dismissed as lazy and incompetent. In 1711 Alexis was married, for raison d'état, to a German princess. She died in 1715 and Alexis immediately tried to escape with his mistress to Austria. Peter tracked him down and promised to allow him a quiet life if he renounced his claim to the succession. Alexis kept his side of the bargain. Peter did not. He had his son imprisoned and tortured to discover the names of people suspected of plotting against him. As a result of Alexis's forced confession he was sentenced to death, but he died as a result of the treatment he had received in prison.

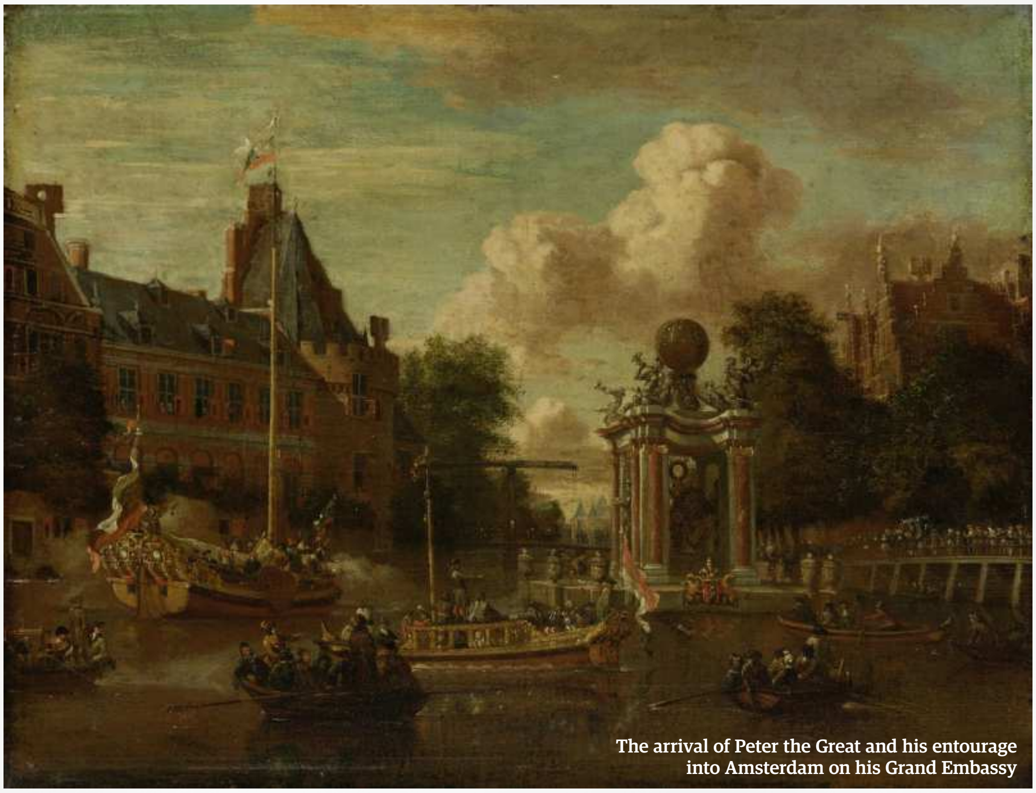

Upon meeting King Louis XV of France, Peter flouted royal protocol and picked up the boy king

formal banquets and welcoming ceremonies. Peter had an insatiable thirst for knowledge and was particularly interested in mastering practical skills such as woodworking or sailing a warship. He could only do this by getting alongside carpenters and crewmen. It is doubtful whether his incognito was ever wholly effective, particularly given his size and his behaviour. Not only was he a head taller than most of his companions, he was constantly restless. Unable to sit still for long he would stride about with jerky, energetic steps, his eyes darting to and fro and his lips twitching. However, Peter did go to considerable lengths to escape the demands of protocol – and for good foreign policy reasons.

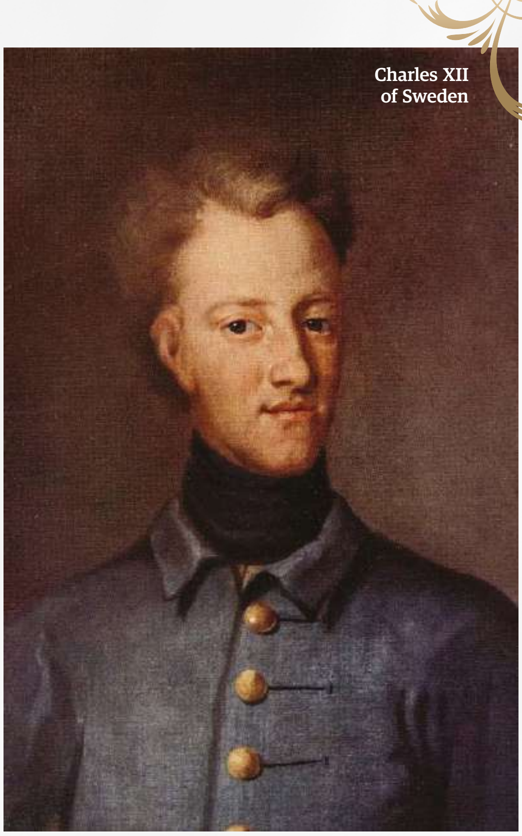
The 1697 extended tour, known as the Grand Embassy, was a vital hands-on venture into practical diplomacy by the young tsar. The expedition took in the north German states, the Netherlands, England, Austria and Poland and, as well as learning first hand what the leading European powers were doing, the tsar wanted to impress upon them that Russia was a major player in the affairs of the continent. Peter was also deliberately poaching. Whenever he discovered a craftsman or military expert or shipbuilder he thought could be of use to him, he made an offer the recipient found hard to refuse.

During these months Peter learned an enormous amount, and he wasted no time putting it into practice. A spate of institutional reforms poured forth from the office of the industrious tsar in the years following his return. He overhauled the taxation system. He established a department of state to oversee the ecclesiastical courts, the administration of church lands and even the daily routine of monks and nuns. Just because some Russians were devoted to a life of religion, that did not absolve them from being efficient and accountable to the tsar. With the aid of leading academics from Britain, Peter set up the Moscow School of Mathematics and Navigation. He established a printworks and gave his literate subjects their first regular newspaper. Peter was conscious of having so much to do and so little time in which to do it. He slept little, regularly rising before dawn, and put in several hours' work before most of his officials had reached their desks. If he upbraided them for laziness, as he frequently did, it was because he needed less rest than they did.

> "PETER WAS CONSCIOUS OF HAVING SO MUCH TO DO AND SO LITTLE TIME IN WHICH TO DO IT"



The arrival of Peter the Great and his entourage into Amsterdam on his Grand Embassy



Charles XII of Sweden

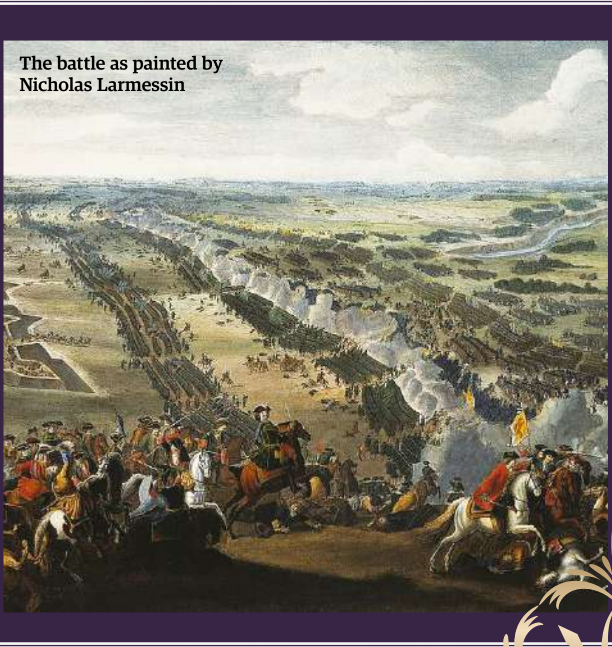
The demon driving him forced his body to keep pace with a mind constantly conceiving new ideas. It is not in the least surprising that his people struggled to keep pace with the reforms their tsar imposed on them, nor that many of those reforms were deeply resented. Peter ordained that the traditional Russian dress of the upper classes was to be abandoned in favour of European fashions, and even that beards were to be trimmed in order to conform to the Western style. Another drastic reform that affected every single one of his subjects was the change of the calendar. Hitherto all date calculations had been based on the Orthodox calendar, which took the supposed creation of the world as its starting point. Peter decreed that the calendar was to be brought into line with the Julian calendar used in Protestant countries and based on the birth of Christ. The year 7209 thus became 1700 CE and New Year's Day was moved from 1 September to 1 January. Inevitably, Peter's comprehensive reforms were not all successful, but this did not deter him. He was a prime example of the maxim later put forward by another great man, Abraham Lincoln: "Success is going from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm."

One of Peter's failures was not persuading other nations to join with him in Russia's long-standing conflict with Turkey. This did not deter him from entering another military alliance with Saxony, Poland and Denmark against Sweden. What has been called the Great Northern War was a confrontation of these European states with Sweden, which had achieved a dominant position in the Baltic region. The time now seemed right to redress the balance for, in 1697, the Swedish crown passed to the teenage Charles XII. What most statesmen failed to realise was that the new, young ruler was a military genius. In terms of

POLTAVA 1709

This battle was described by Daniel Defoe as "an army of veterans beaten by a mob"

On 8 July 1709 Peter the Great confronted Charles XII for a showdown to decide who held the military supremacy in eastern Europe. Charles, acknowledged as the finest strategist of the age, had decided to march his army into Moscow. He was thwarted not by Peter's superior skill as a general, but by a series of misfortunes. Charles decided to rest his men in the Ukraine for the winter and rendezvous there with another army coming from the Baltic port of Riga. 1709 turned out to be the worst winter in living memory. The Swedes, far from home in alien territory, suffered from famine and frostbite. Between 5,000 and 8,000 died. Peter's army experienced the same conditions, but their supply lines were secure and they were able to see out the winter. When spring arrived Charles heard that his reinforcements were severely delayed. Peter stationed his 40,000 men in a defensive position near the town of Poltava and waited for the army of 25,000 Swedes to attack. Charles' final misfortune was to be wounded by a musket shot in a skirmish which prevented him assuming command in the field. Peter waited while the Swedes exhausted themselves attacking a series of redoubts. Only after several hours did Peter march out his men for the battle. Now, superior numbers told. The Swedes lost two-fifths of their army in casualties and prisoners, Charles fled into exile, Sweden's Baltic supremacy collapsed and Russia's position as a European power was secured.



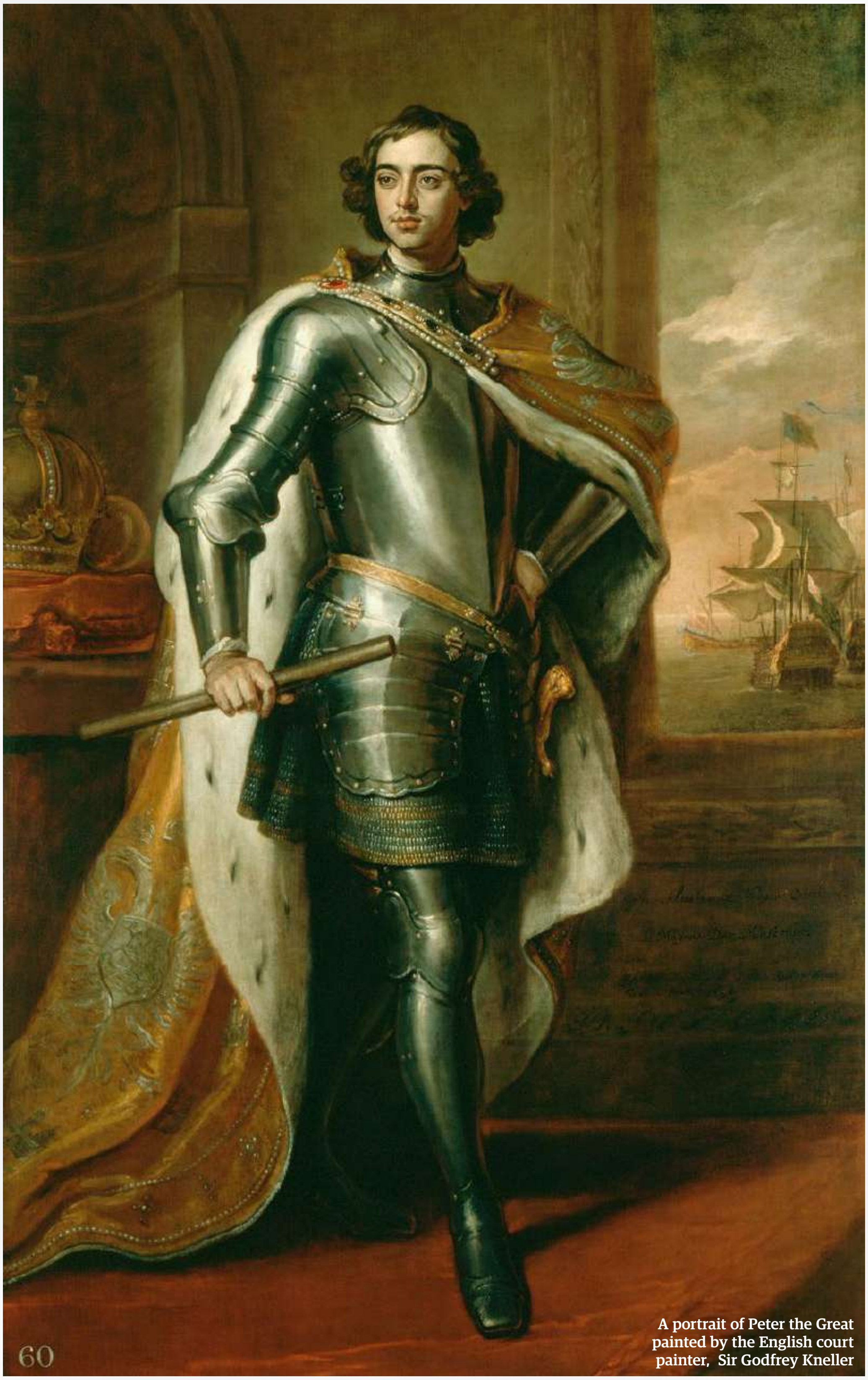
The battle as painted by Nicholas Larmessin sheer determination he was a match for Tsar Peter.

Their first confrontation ended in a crushing and humiliating defeat for Peter. His 40,000-strong army laid siege to the Baltic port of Narva in the autumn of 1700. The tsar calculated that he could take this strategic city before Charles could get there. He was wrong. The Swedish king marched an army of 9,000 well-trained men to Narva and crushed the poorly led Russian troops. Charles rubbed salt into the wound by having a medal struck showing Peter fleeing the field in tears. But now it was Charles's turn to underestimate his foe. Instead of following up his victory by thrusting deep into Russian territory, he turned his attention to other members of the alliance. This enabled Peter to reorganise his forces and, crucially, to recruit more troops. Russia's great military asset was the size of its serf population. The tsar could always conscript thousands of new troops to make up for those lost in battle. With imperious lack of concern for the suffering of his men, he observed: "The Swedes will go on beating us for a long time but eventually they will teach us how to beat them." In August 1704, Peter was back before the walls of Narva with a much-improved army. This time the garrison was forced to surrender.

But this was not Peter's most significant victory. Just 15 months earlier he had captured the small island fortress of Nyenschantz at the eastern end of the Baltic. Control of this bleak, marshy region was of immense strategic importance. It was here that Peter began the building of a new city and port. It would be called St Petersburg.

Peter was one of those exceedingly rare people who possessed vision of heroic proportions linked with the power and the energy to make it a reality. That implied ruthlessness. His battles were won and his buildings created at the cost of many thousands of lives. To pay for ambitious programmes he imposed crippling taxes and debased the coinage, thus promoting inflation. His need for iron to manufacture guns for his army and navy led to the development of new mining and metalworking industries. However, before these could go into full-scale production he met his short-term needs by ordering church bells to be melted down. In any assessment of the reign the achievements always have to be weighed against the costs.

The tsar's personal life was marked by the same impulsiveness and arbitrariness that he manifested in public affairs. At the age of 17 he married Eudoxia Lopakhina, a girl whose beauty was, it would seem, her only asset. She certainly possessed none of the mental and physical stamina the wife of a man like Peter needed. She gave birth to only one son – Alexis – who survived infancy. The marriage rapidly went stale and, in 1698, Peter divorced her and packed her off to a nunnery. The story of Peter's second marriage reads very differently. In 1702 the Russian army laid siege to



A portrait of Peter the Great painted by the English court painter, Sir Godfrey Kneller

"PETER WAS ONE OF THOSE RARE PEOPLE WHO POSSESSED VISION OF HEROIC PROPORTIONS"

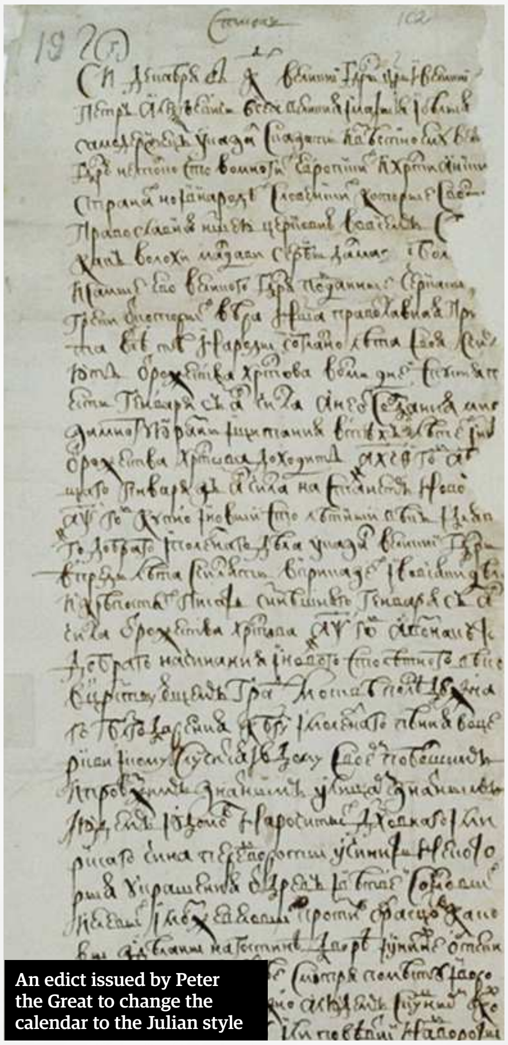
Marienburg in Lithuania. Among the hundreds of civilians taken prisoner was Martha Skavronskaya, an 18-year-old servant girl. Martha was not only pretty, she was an extremely strong character, and Peter fell for her as soon as they met. She soon became his constant and dearest companion. She shared his drinking bouts, she accompanied him on military campaigns, she was a buffer between him and the world and the only person who could calm his towering rages. On several occasions she intervened to save men who had provoked the tsar's wrath. Perhaps the greatest reason for their close bond was that Martha was able to share Peter's love of the simple life.

While St Petersburg was being constructed they lived together in a log cabin, where Martha performed the duties of an ordinary housewife and Peter tended the garden. In 1705 she converted to the Orthodox faith and took the baptismal name of Catherine. Two years later, according to legend, the couple were married in a ceremony that had to be kept secret because many Russians refused to accept the legality of Peter's separation from Eudoxia and would have been scandalised by his marriage to a foreigner – and a peasant at that! In 1712, however, they were married officially. During the early years of their relationship Catherine was almost constantly pregnant, though only two of her children, Anna and Elizabeth, survived infancy. In 1724 she was named co-ruler of Russia.

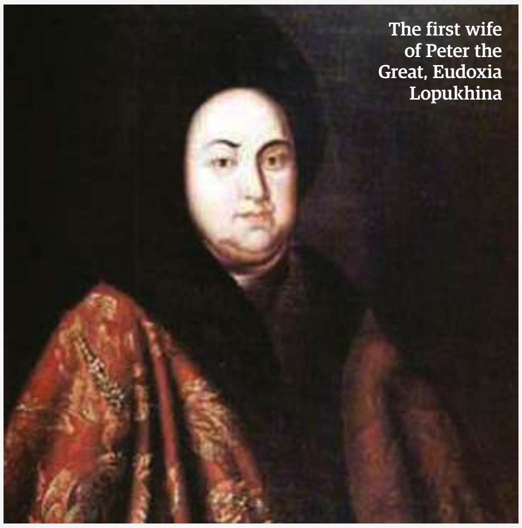
This was made necessary by the uncertainty governing the succession – an uncertainty for which the tsar was entirely to blame. Peter had always been at enmity with the Tsarevich Alexis, his only son, born to his first wife, the spurned Eudoxia. The boy had become the focus of all the political groups in Russia who hated the Petrine reforms and wanted a return to the old ways. Peter, convinced that the young man was plotting against him, had him arrested, and Alexis died as a result of his treatment in prison in 1718. This left as possible successors: Peter's wife; his two daughters, Anne and Elizabeth; the two daughters of Peter's half-brother, Ivan V, Catherine and Anne; and two grandsons, both named Peter. One was the son of the rejected Alexis and the other was the son of the tsar's elder daughter. By a law passed in 1722, Peter the Great established his right to nominate his own heir. But he never made his wishes known. When he died in 1725 no-one knew where Russia was headed. Would reaction set in, returning the country to its old ways, or would a new ruler emerge capable of building on Peter's achievements?

And what were those achievements which, with the advantage of hindsight, we can enumerate?

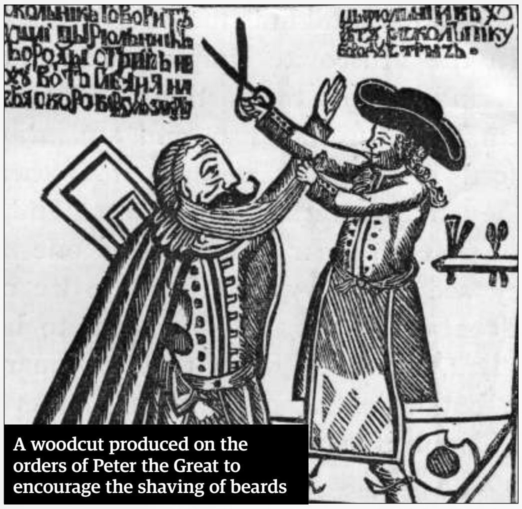
There was scarcely an aspect of Russian life that he did not transform – the army, the navy, international commerce, the institutions of government, industry, the calendar, the coinage, the written language, the way people dressed, education – not to mention the creation of one of Europe's most beautiful cities, St Petersburg. Peter's reputation has constantly been a matter of dispute. Sometimes he has been judged the worst kind of tyrant; at others he has been seen in the kindly guise of the most benevolent of dictators. Some people see him as the rescuer of his country from the dead hand of the past. Others label him an oppressor of the people, indistinguishable from the despots of earlier centuries. Some praise the ruler who brought his country into the community of leading nations. Others deplore the tsar who was the traitor to everything truly Russian. What is beyond question is that Peter the Great belongs to that tiny collection of rulers who changed his country, changed the age in which he lived and changed history.



An edict issued by Peter the Great to change the calendar to the Julian style



The first wife of Peter the Great, Eudoxia Lopukhina



A woodcut produced on the orders of Peter the Great to encourage the shaving of beards

PETER'S TRUSTED ADVISERS

The tsar chose the men to place in high office, though not always wisely

Two examples give us some idea of the men Peter trusted. General Patrick Gordon was a Scottish Catholic and royalist who left Britain when Cromwell came to power and became a mercenary soldier. In 1660 he became one of several Scots serving in the Russian army. Tsar Alexis was very impressed with Gordon and promoted him to general, the only foreigner to hold that rank. In the crisis of 1689 when Sophia attempted to seize power, Gordon's swift action turned the tables and probably saved Peter's life. The bond formed between the two men was so close that Gordon was left in control of Moscow during Peter's Grand Embassy. In 1698 he suppressed a streltsy uprising. When Gordon died the following year Peter ordered his funeral to be observed with full Catholic ritual.

Alexander Menshikov was a Muscovite of very humble origins whose main characteristic was self-promotion. He joined the young tsar's toy regiments at Preobrazhenskoye and went on to serve in Peter's earlier military campaigns. He proved himself an extremely effective field general and was steadily promoted, but what cemented the friendship was his 'passing on' to the tsar his mistress, Martha Skavronskaya. Peter lavished titles and lands on his friend, but Menshikov repaid this generosity by being notoriously corrupt. On many occasions only his charm protected him from Peter's anger. After the tsar's death he became instrumental in transferring power to Peter's widow – and his close friend – the Empress Catherine I.

©Getty

PETER I

THE CITY BUILT ON BONES

One of Europe's most beautiful cities came into being thanks to the vision of one man and the sacrifice of thousands

Words **Derek Wilson**

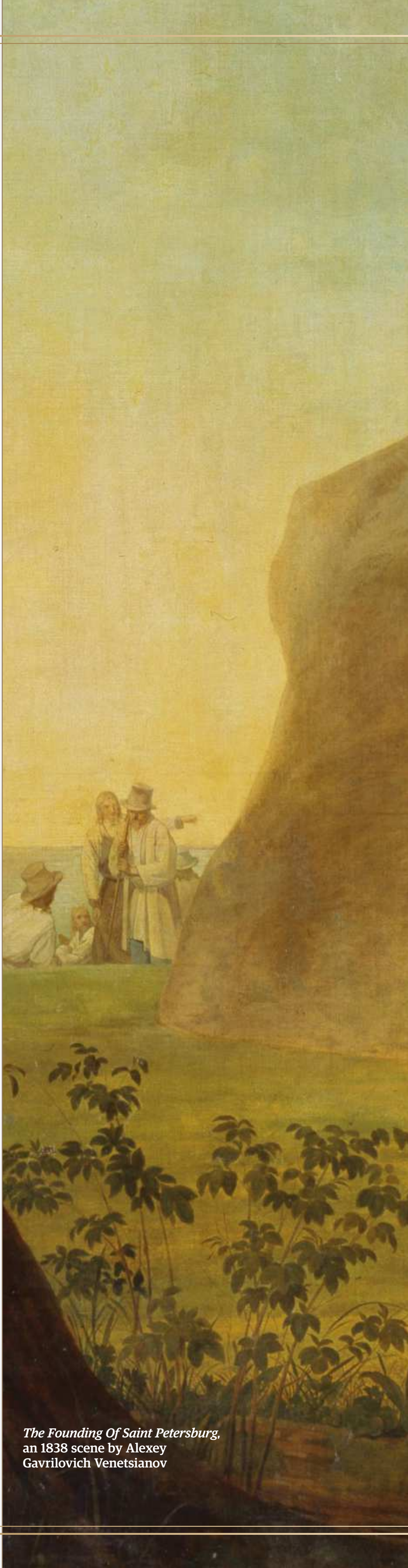
St Petersburg, sometimes called 'The Venice of the North', is a city of fine houses, wide streets, canals with elegant bridges, a cathedral, naval arsenal, one of the world's finest museums, theatres, parks with classical statuary and wide views across the gulf where the Neva empties itself into the Baltic. It takes an enormous leap of the imagination to picture it as it looked more than 300 years ago: a scattering of marshy, forested islands with a peasant population in primitive hovels. The story of this remarkable transformation is intimately bound up with the story of a remarkable man.

Peter Alexeyvich of the House of Romanov (1672-1725) was the only son born to Tsar Alexis by his second wife, Natalya Naryshkina. He was only three when his father died, leaving the Russian throne to his eldest son (by a former marriage), the teenage Feodor, an educated and intellectually enlightened ruler, though seriously restricted by semi-paralysis. Peter grew up in an extended royal court - a prince with no serious prospects of achieving political power. All that changed in 1682 when Feodor died without an heir, which gave rise to violent dynastic in-fighting. Peter, the younger of the two remaining Romanov boys, was proclaimed tsar.

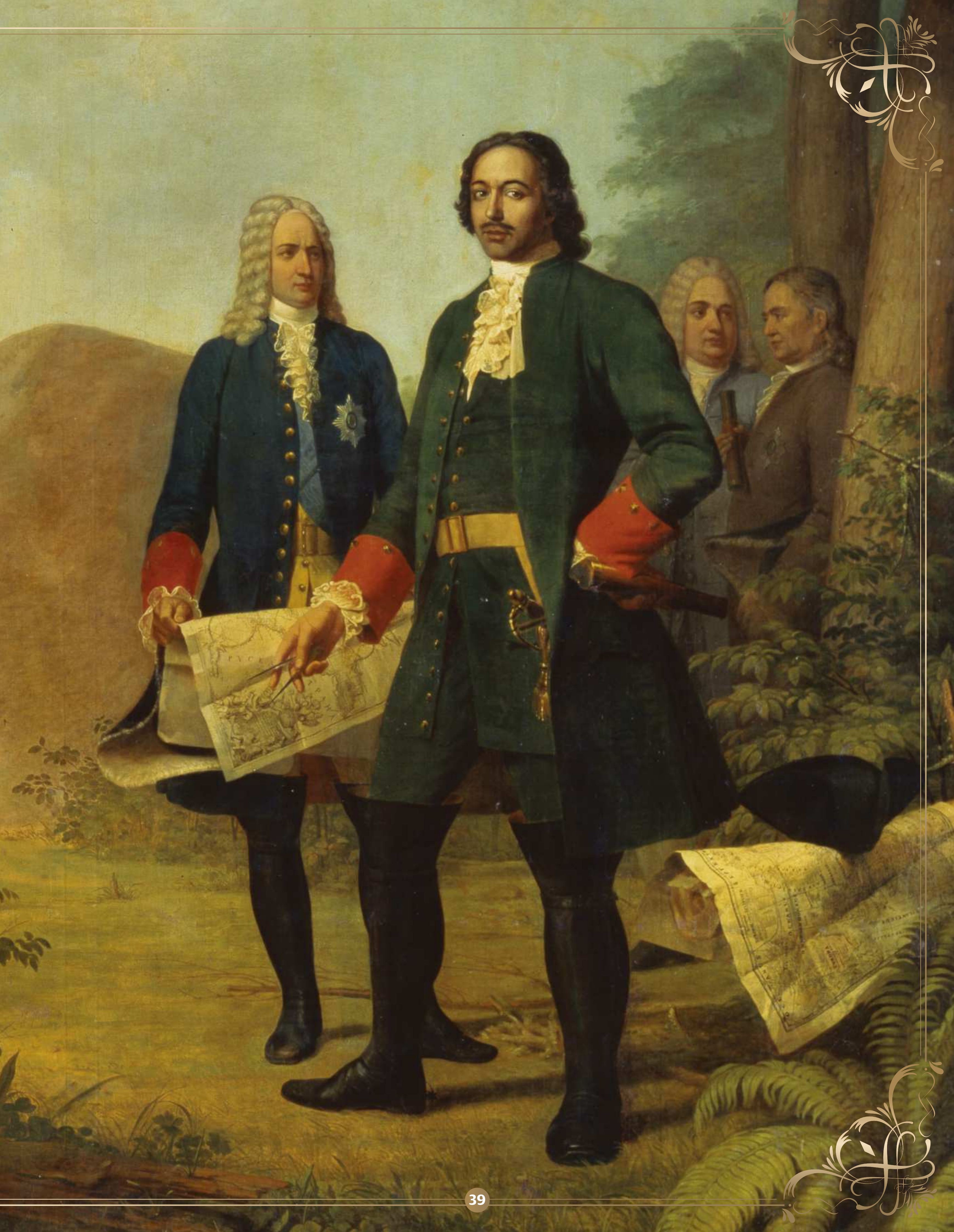
To many it was an obvious choice. Peter was a healthy, vigorous lad while his half-brother, Ivan, was seriously disabled, both physically and mentally. However, the Miloslavskys, Tsar Alexis's first wife's family, were not prepared to lose power and intrigued to have Ivan as tsar.

They whipped up a military revolt among the musketeers, the streltsy, and after days of violence and bloodshed, a compromise was reached: Ivan and Peter would rule jointly but real power would be held by Ivan's strong-willed sister, the 25-year-old Sophia. For her, this could only be temporary. She knew that Ivan was unlikely to live long and devoted her energies to ensuring that Peter and his family, the Naryshkins, would be in no position to challenge her authority. She married Ivan off in the hope of siring a male heir but his only child was a girl. Sophia then turned to the streltsy for support. In 1689, a palace coup aimed at seizing Peter and his mother failed, and this was the end for Sophia and her clique. She had overplayed her hand and nothing remained for her but incarceration in a nunnery. Peter became de facto sole ruler and, after Ivan's death in 1691, de jure sole ruler.

Peter was 'big' in every way. By the time he was out of his teens, he was an astonishing two metres tall, immensely strong and athletic. He was seldom to be found in the Kremlin, with its priest-dominated, intricate ceremonies. In fact, he set up his own parody of the tsarist court - the All-Mad, All-Drunken, All-Jesting Assembly. Peter's appetites - drink, food, partying, sex, practical jokes - were large in scale. But this wayward self-



The Founding Of Saint Petersburg, an 1838 scene by Alexey Gavrilovich Venetsianov



indulgence was not the whole man. Chief among his enthusiasms was an overwhelming curiosity. He studied with intensity everything that captured his attention – but not from books. Peter was a down-to-earth student of practical skills, from carpentry, metalwork, shipbuilding and navigation to military tactics. He was often found in the company of the 'foreign' community at Kokui.

This was where Western merchants, diplomats and military advisers who had business with the government were obliged to reside. Russia had traditionally cut itself off from the West, believing its own culture to be superior, but the young tsar realised that future greatness would depend on mastering the skills that had been developed in Sweden, Germany, Holland, France and England. He wanted to know about the building of ocean-going ships (Russia had no access to the oceans), running international businesses, military training, even Western dress. It was from his contact with Westerners that there developed a new vision – the vision of a greater Russia with a major role in world affairs.

By the time Peter came to the throne, Russia was by far the world's largest land empire, bounded by the White Sea in the north, the Caspian in the south, Poland in the west and – 10,000 kilometres to the east – the Bering Sea. Impressive as that might look on a map, Russia's power and potential wealth were constrained by exclusion from oceanic shipping lanes. The Baltic was controlled by Sweden, while access to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean was blocked by the Ottoman Turks and the far-distant Pacific coast was ice-bound much of the year. However, Peter was determined to pierce the geographical walls hemming Russia in. As soon as his sole rule was secure, he left for an extended tour of western capitals.

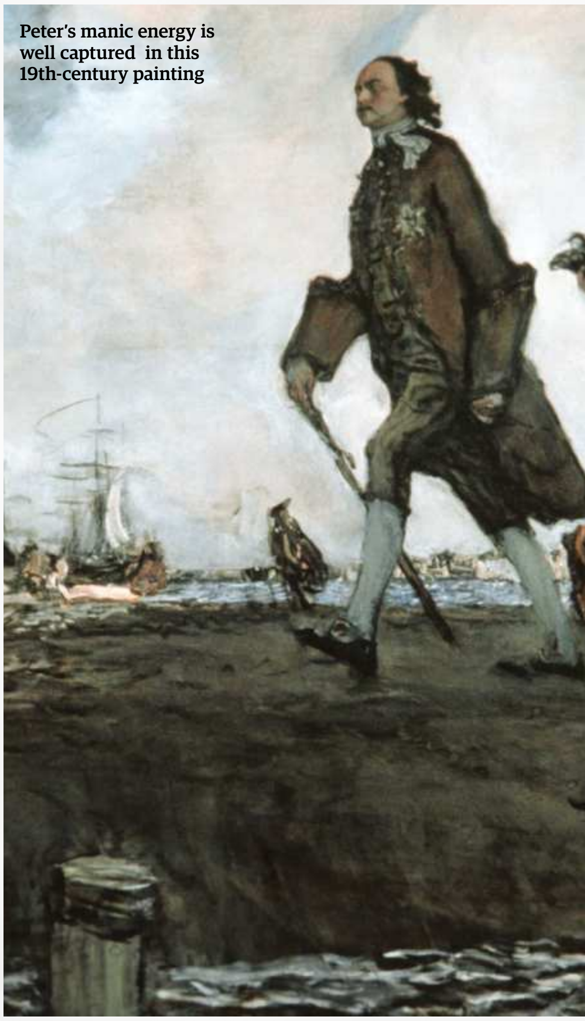
The Grand Embassy set out in March 1697. Peter had two main objectives – to see for himself the technical achievements of Western nations and to impress upon their rulers that he was an indispensable partner in the long-running conflict with the Ottoman Empire. Those who played host to the Grand Embassy had very little knowledge of the land and people east of the Dnieper. They were intrigued to meet the tsar – and he certainly made an impression.

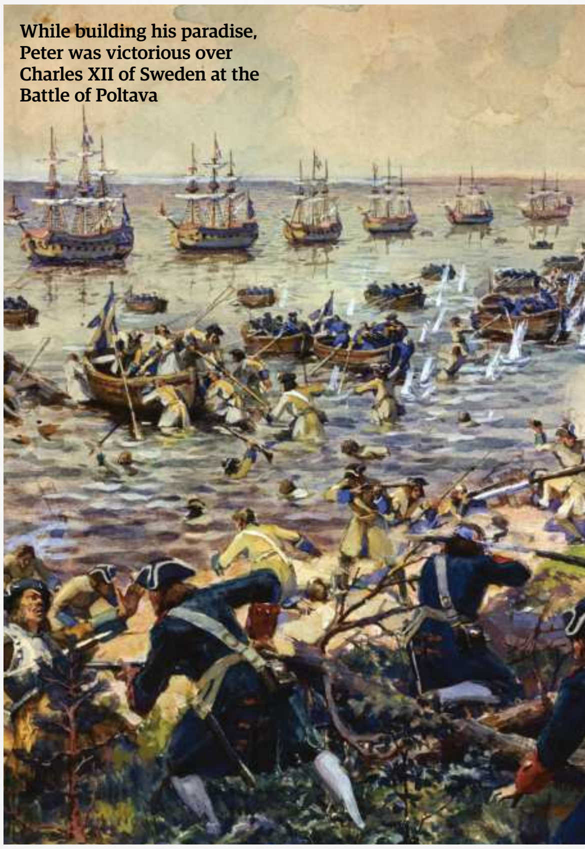
Peter's courtiers lacked the refinement and stylised behaviour of their Western counterparts. They failed to show to royal officials the respect they considered to be their due. The Russians' capacity for strong drink was particularly noted. As for the tsar himself, his hosts found it difficult to entertain a royal visitor who had no interest in hunting and was embarrassingly clumsy on the dance floor. They discovered that feasting and fireworks were the tsar's favourite diversions.

What Peter was particularly eager to see for himself was the great ocean-going, gun-bristling warships and merchantmen perfected by the leading maritime nations. His first destination was the dockyard at Riga, where he roused the hostility of the Swedes by taking notes about their latest vessels. He received a warmer welcome from William of Orange, Stadtholder of Holland (and also joint ruler of England with his wife, Mary II). He spent four and a half months in Amsterdam, most of it working as a carpenter in the dockyard of the Dutch East India Company. He travelled on to England in January 1698, but not with his entire entourage – instead, he was accompanied only by a few intimate companions on this part of the voyage. They toured the capital, Peter always preferring to walk everywhere instead of going by carriage, even though he hated being gawped at as a curio wherever he went. Once again, he escaped as soon as possible from the grand entertainments that were laid on for him. He wanted to spend time at the naval dockyard at Deptford.

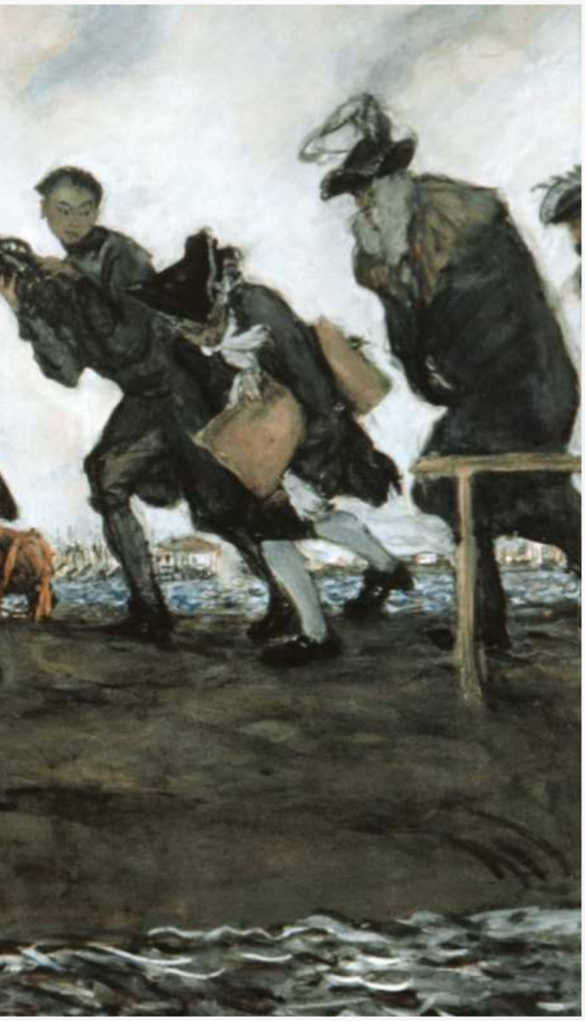
Arrangements were made for the royal guest to occupy the nearby country house of Sayes Court belonging to diarist John Evelyn. Evelyn was very fond of his family home and particularly the garden. He seems to have been proud that the house was to be made into a residence for the royal guest and was "new furnished for him by the King". His gratification did not last. Peter was in his element at Deptford, where he talked with master builders, studied their plans and learned the basic principles of their craft. He took possession of the Royal Transport, a sleek new vessel presented to him by King William, and proudly sailed it up the river. In March, a trip to Portsmouth was arranged, England's main naval base. Here, the visitors had a great time watching and participating in mock battles and reviewing some of the finest men-of-war. Yet it was not only information that Peter took back to Russia; he did not hesitate to poach men. Whenever he came into contact with someone who could be useful, he tried to lure him into service. As a result, hundreds of

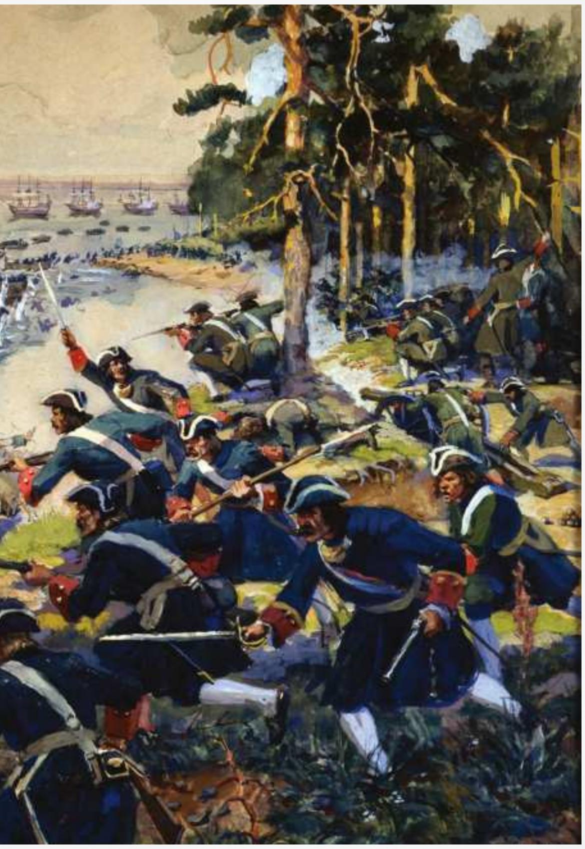
> "HE SET UP HIS OWN ALL-MAD, ALL-DRUNKEN, ALL-JESTING ASSEMBLY"

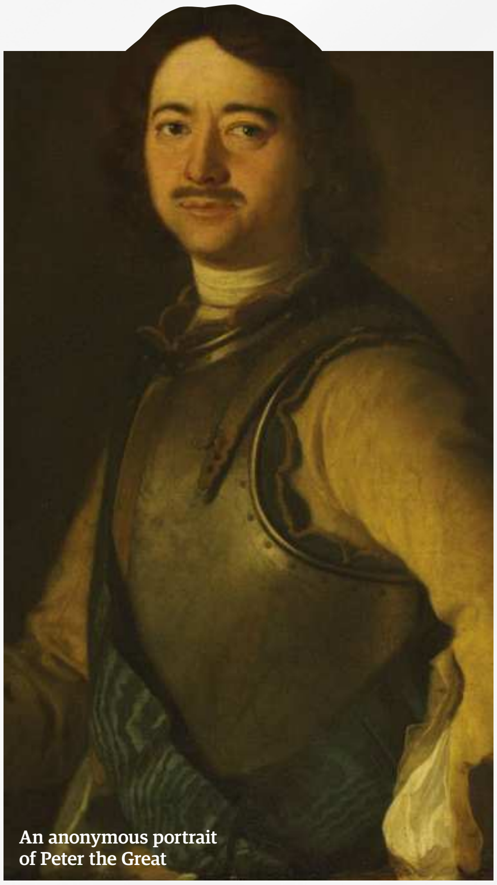

Peter's manic energy is well captured in this 19th-century painting


While building his paradise, Peter was victorious over Charles XII of Sweden at the Battle of Poltava

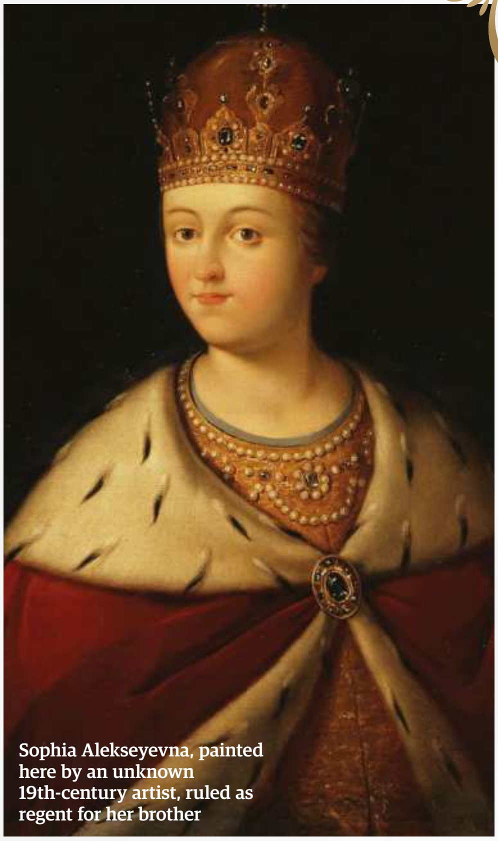
The city built on bones







An anonymous portrait of Peter the Great



Sophia Alekseyevna, painted here by an unknown 19th-century artist, ruled as regent for her brother

captains, lieutenants, engineers, mathematicians and artisans were recruited for the tsar's navy, shipyards and the academy he had set up to train a whole generation of ship's officers.

This was not the only example of the tsar's ungracious repayment of English hospitality. At Sayes Court, he and his companions let their hair down with a vengeance. When the Russians had gone, Evelyn discovered that their wild parties and drinking bouts had reduced the house to a wreck. Inside he found broken furniture, slashed paintings, shattered windows and torn curtains. If anything, the state of his beloved garden was worse. Luckily, the government picked up the bill as William was astute enough to realise that the ruler of Russia, determined to intervene in European affairs, would be a valuable ally in his long-running conflict with France.

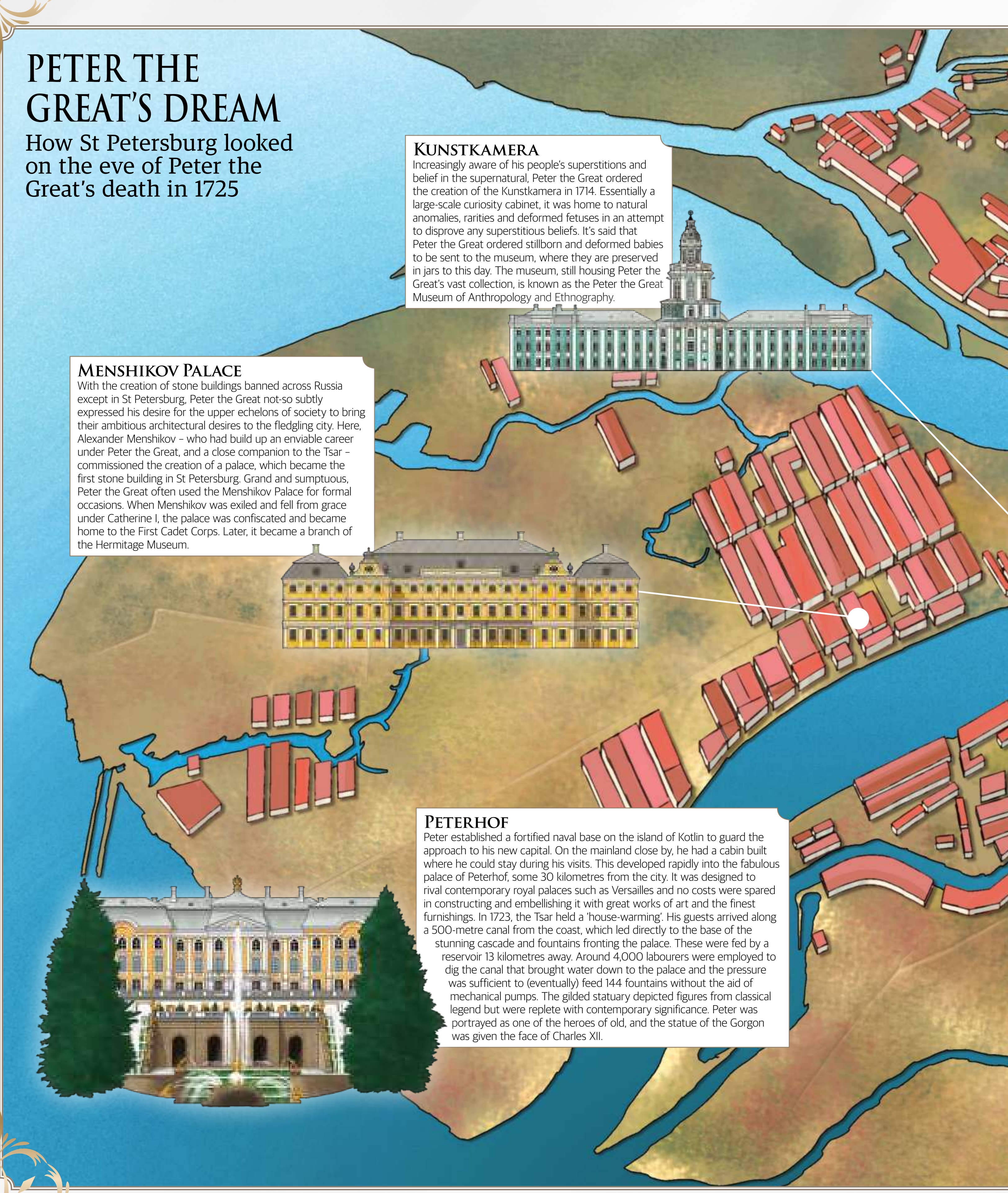
Back in Moscow, Peter set about transforming Russian society. He abolished the old calendar to bring his country into line with the West. He ordered everyone except priests and peasants to wear Western dress. He revolutionised government administration and the legal system. He inaugurated the publishing of the first regular newspaper. But what revealed his most important plans was his creation of a standing army and navy. The new Russia of his vision was to be based on military conquest and the enemy in his sights was Sweden.

The timing seemed right for a challenge to the great Baltic empire. In 1589, Charles XI of Sweden had died. His successor, Charles XII, was a mere boy of 14. However, he turned out to be as ruthless, adventurous and autocratic as his Russian counterpart - and in military strategy he was Peter's superior. The first round in what came to be the Great Northern War (1700-1721) was won by Charles. Peter remained optimistic, however, He based his confidence on two realities that have come to Russia's aid in times of crisis - its large population and its wide tracts of inhospitable terrain. Charles, he calculated, would never be able to win a final victory. Thus secure, Peter could throw all his energies into building his war machine. In May 1703, he had his first victory when his forces overwhelmed a small Swedish citadel at the mouth of the Neva. In military terms it was a small triumph, but insignificant it certainly was not.

If he could maintain permanent hold of this stretch of estuarial mud and marshy islands on the edge of the Gulf of Finland, Peter would be able to establish a naval base and port through which his new fleet of ocean-going ships would have access to the Baltic - and the world. All this Peter could see, but to others the idea seemed impracticable to the point of absolute madness. However, pragmatism had never deterred Peter from pursuing wild ideas and he immediately set about finding a site for his new base. He had engineers and architects draw up plans, and it rapidly became clear that what he

PETER THE GREAT'S DREAM

How St Petersburg looked on the eve of Peter the Great's death in 1725



Kunstkamera

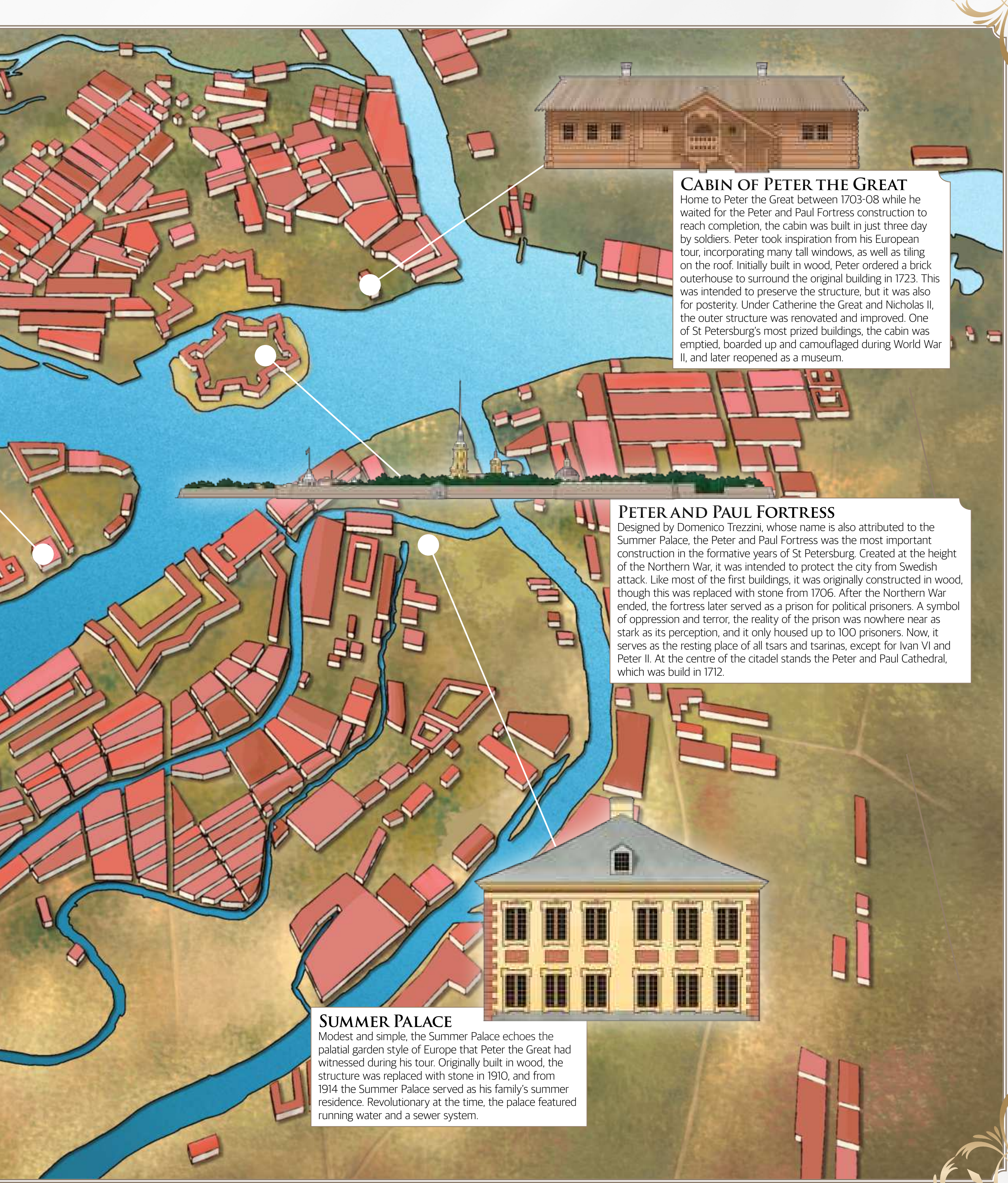
Increasingly aware of his people's superstitions and belief in the supernatural, Peter the Great ordered the creation of the Kunstkamera in 1714. Essentially a large-scale curiosity cabinet, it was home to natural anomalies, rarities and deformed fetuses in an attempt to disprove any superstitious beliefs. It's said that Peter the Great ordered stillborn and deformed babies to be sent to the museum, where they are preserved in jars to this day. The museum, still housing Peter the Great's vast collection, is known as the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography.

Menshikov Palace

With the creation of stone buildings banned across Russia except in St Petersburg, Peter the Great not-so subtly expressed his desire for the upper echelons of society to bring their ambitious architectural desires to the fledgling city. Here, Alexander Menshikov – who had build up an enviable career under Peter the Great, and a close companion to the Tsar – commissioned the creation of a palace, which became the first stone building in St Petersburg. Grand and sumptuous, Peter the Great often used the Menshikov Palace for formal occasions. When Menshikov was exiled and fell from grace under Catherine I, the palace was confiscated and became home to the First Cadet Corps. Later, it became a branch of the Hermitage Museum.

Peterhof

Peter established a fortified naval base on the island of Kotlin to guard the approach to his new capital. On the mainland close by, he had a cabin built where he could stay during his visits. This developed rapidly into the fabulous palace of Peterhof, some 30 kilometres from the city. It was designed to rival contemporary royal palaces such as Versailles and no costs were spared in constructing and embellishing it with great works of art and the finest furnishings. In 1723, the Tsar held a 'house-warming'. His guests arrived along a 500-metre canal from the coast, which led directly to the base of the stunning cascade and fountains fronting the palace. These were fed by a reservoir 13 kilometres away. Around 4,000 labourers were employed to dig the canal that brought water down to the palace and the pressure was sufficient to (eventually) feed 144 fountains without the aid of mechanical pumps. The gilded statuary depicted figures from classical legend but were replete with contemporary significance. Peter was portrayed as one of the heroes of old, and the statue of the Gorgon was given the face of Charles XII.



CABIN OF PETER THE GREAT

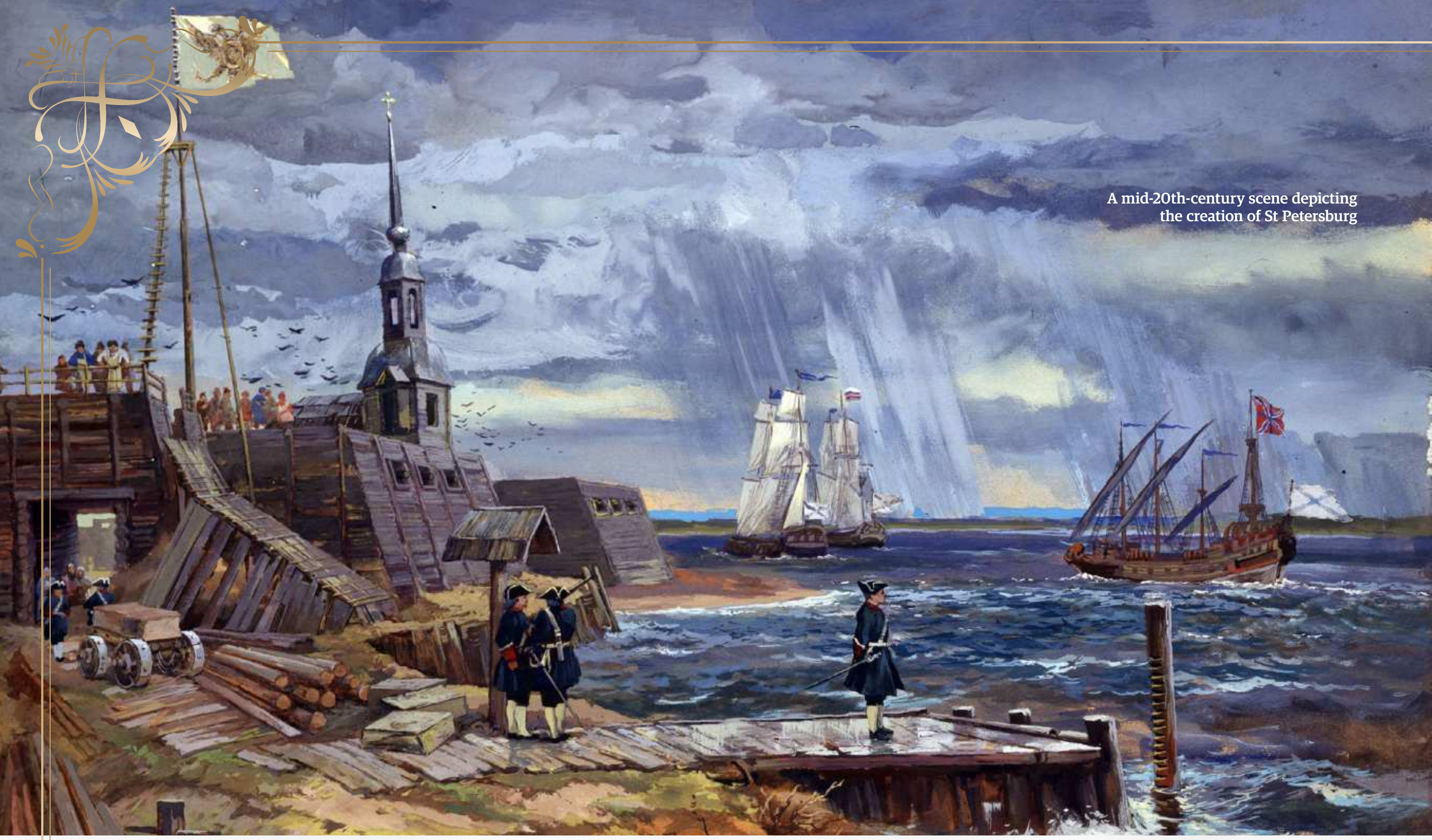
Home to Peter the Great between 1703-08 while he waited for the Peter and Paul Fortress construction to reach completion, the cabin was built in just three day by soldiers. Peter took inspiration from his European tour, incorporating many tall windows, as well as tiling on the roof. Initially built in wood, Peter ordered a brick outerhouse to surround the original building in 1723. This was intended to preserve the structure, but it was also for posterity. Under Catherine the Great and Nicholas II, the outer structure was renovated and improved. One of St Petersburg's most prized buildings, the cabin was emptied, boarded up and camouflaged during World War II, and later reopened as a museum.

PETER AND PAUL FORTRESS

Designed by Domenico Trezzini, whose name is also attributed to the Summer Palace, the Peter and Paul Fortress was the most important construction in the formative years of St Petersburg. Created at the height of the Northern War, it was intended to protect the city from Swedish attack. Like most of the first buildings, it was originally constructed in wood, though this was replaced with stone from 1706. After the Northern War ended, the fortress later served as a prison for political prisoners. A symbol of oppression and terror, the reality of the prison was nowhere near as stark as its perception, and it only housed up to 100 prisoners. Now, it serves as the resting place of all tsars and tsarinas, except for Ivan VI and Peter II. At the centre of the citadel stands the Peter and Paul Cathedral, which was build in 1712.

SUMMER PALACE

Modest and simple, the Summer Palace echoes the palatial garden style of Europe that Peter the Great had witnessed during his tour. Originally built in wood, the structure was replaced with stone in 1910, and from 1914 the Summer Palace served as his family's summer residence. Revolutionary at the time, the palace featured running water and a sewer system.



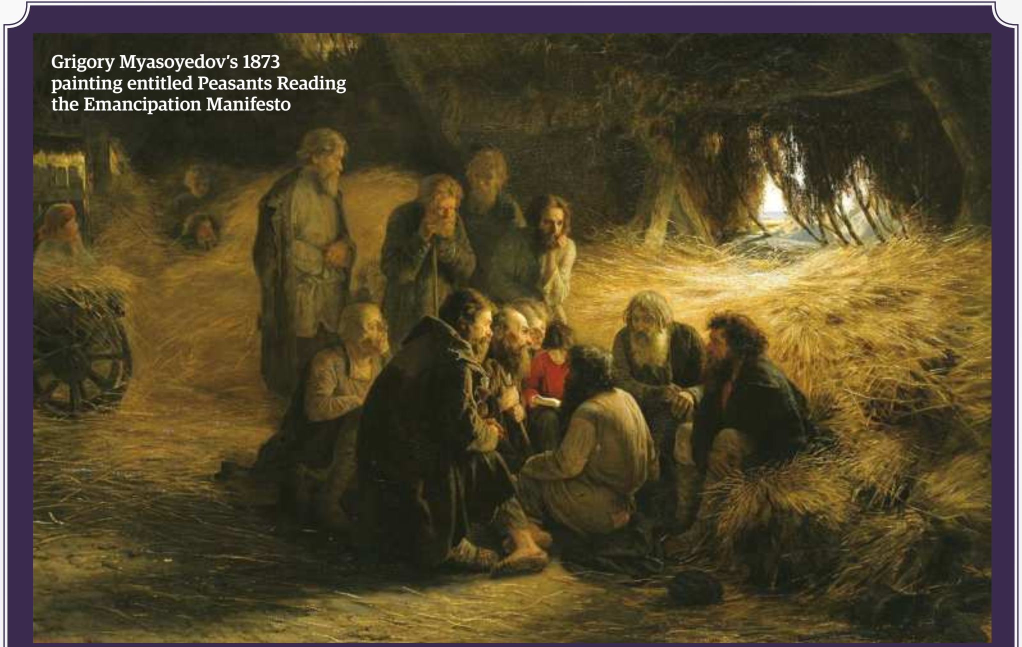
A mid-20th-century scene depicting the creation of St Petersburg

had in mind was not just a military outpost. What he envisaged was a city.

The place he was already calling St Petersburg would have to have a harbour capable of accommodating scores of ships and an infrastructure to service it. More than that, it had to have status. St Petersburg would be the first glimpse most foreign visitors would have of Peter's empire. He wanted them to see a city that compared favourably with any other in Europe. Peter had been particularly impressed by Amsterdam. If the Dutch could defy nature and create a maritime capital on soggy, flood-prone ground, so could he.

Peter identified wholly with this place that, in his letters, he called Paradise". The new city reached out towards the sea, which he loved, and was conceptually and geographically far removed from Moscow, which he hated. Peter visited the building site as often as possible and had a log cabin built, from which he directed all the work. When he was elsewhere, the tsar kept in touch with engineers, architects and builders by a constant stream of letters. His precise instructions covered every aspect, even down to the type of paint to be used on external walls.

A city needs people, both to build it and to live in it. The first category was no problem for Russia's autocratic ruler. He had at his disposal an unending supply of labourers. Serfs were brought to the site every year in the summer, 30,000 to 40,000 at a time,



Grigory Myasoyedov's 1873 painting entitled Peasants Reading the Emancipation Manifesto

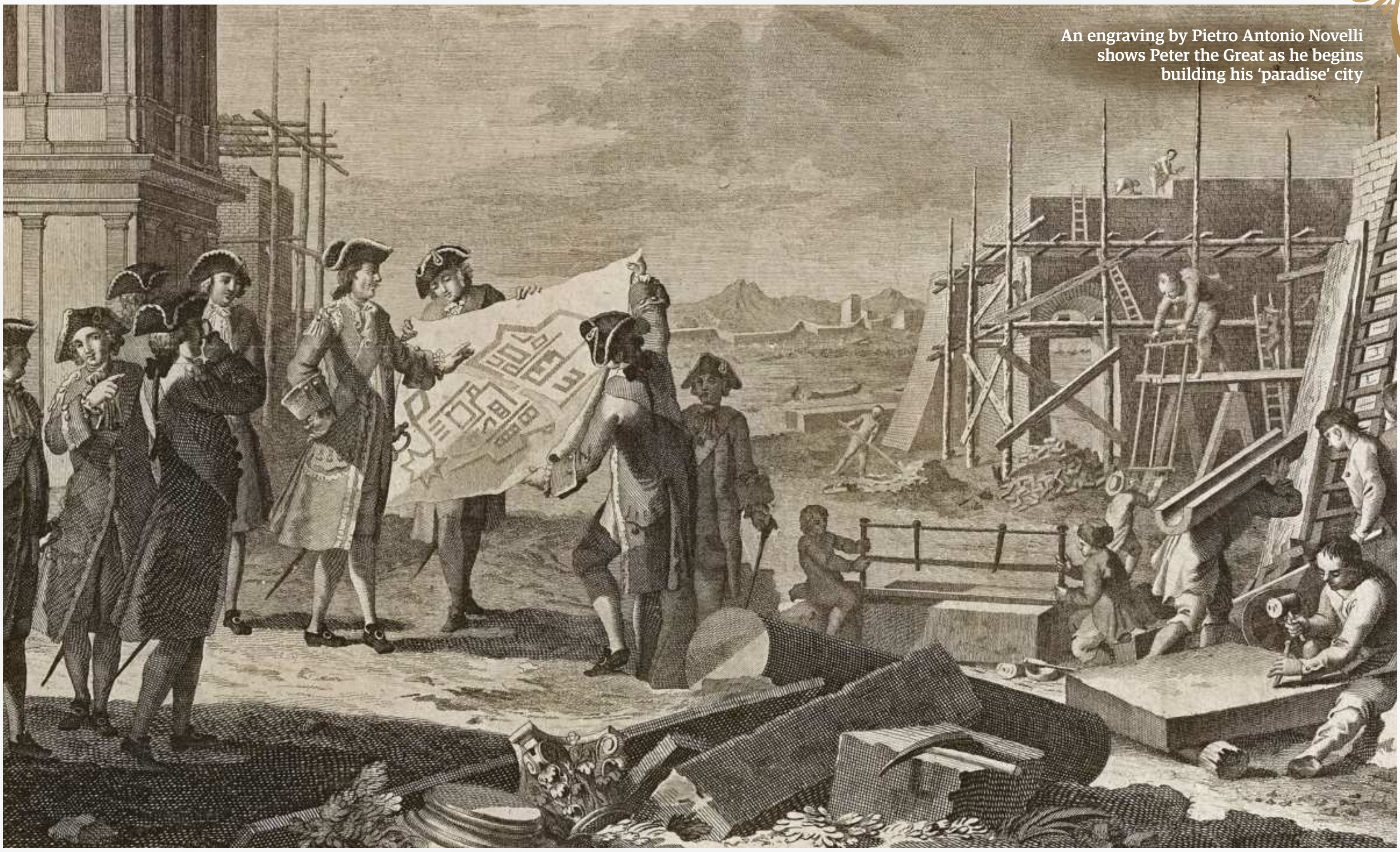
THE SERFS THAT SERVED

How slave labour and the feudal system realised a tsar's dream

Using a combination of slave labour from Swedish prisoners of war and convicts, as well as conscripting serfs from across the kingdom, the tsar's dream was realised through the sacrifice of the lowest in society.

Historians estimate that of the 550,000 workers that were roped into constructing the city during its fledgling years, up to 100,000 perished as a result of the near-constant biting cold, widespread famine and disease, their bodies either lying forgotten under the city's foundations, or having been swept away as a result of inevitable flooding.

Despite being celebrated for his liberal and enlightened policies, Peter the Great actually narrowed the division between serf and slave until the two became nigh-on indistinguishable from each other.



An engraving by Pietro Antonio Novelli shows Peter the Great as he begins building his 'paradise' city

"Some have estimated that St Petersburg cost the lives of more than 100,000 forced workers"

their numbers augmented by Swedish prisoners. How many died in the cold, wet marshland will never be known. Some have estimated that St Petersburg cost the lives of more than 100,000 forced workers and within a few years it was known as the 'city built on bones'. One can only imagine how unpopular the growing city was with the workforce. As soon as government and public buildings could be constructed, Peter moved his court and administrative offices. This meant that Moscow society had to relocate. Its leading members were ordered to build substantial houses in the new capital and take up residence with their families. They resented it, and with reason: "All manner of provisions are usually three or four times as dear and forage for their horses, etc. at least six or eight times as dear as it is at Moscow, which happens from the small quantity which the country thereabouts produces, being more than two thirds woods and bogs..."

The dislocation might not have been so bad if the new residents had been allowed to design their own town houses but Peter, the great town planner, laid down a scheme of wide streets, squares, parks, churches and bridges and ordained that domestic dwellings should be in a uniform style. All this would, by itself, have been a major accomplishment but while Peter was building Paradise, he was also fighting the Great Northern War. The dashing and brilliant Charles XII was concentrating his efforts against enemies in lands bordering the central Baltic, believing that he could dispose of the uncivilised Russian ruler at his leisure. The tsar encouraged and supported his anti-Swedish allies, conserving his resources in readiness for the inevitable showdown.

It came in 1708-09. Charles decided to strike directly at Moscow with an army of 35,000 men, which he aimed to augment with a force of 12,500, currently at Riga on the Baltic under General Adam Löwenhaupt. By the time he reached Mogilev on the Berezina in the autumn of 1708, reinforcements had not arrived and his men were weary. The king decided to defer his assault on Moscow and head south to spend the winter among Peter's Cossack rebels in the Ukraine. Peter now out-thought his foe. He sent one force to the Ukraine to reassert his authority and personally led another to confront Löwenhaupt. His victory over the general left the Swedes without vital supplies in what turned out to be one of the worst winters in living memory. Charles lost half his army to frostbite and starvation. Still, he believed that he was more than a match for his adversary in a pitched battle. That battle occurred on 27 June 1709 at Poltava. Charles's troops fought heroically under impeccable discipline throughout a long morning of fluctuating fortunes, but eventually superior numbers and the leadership of a tsar, who had, as he had said, learned from the Swedes how they could be defeated, triumphed.

Peter had 15 and a half more years to live - years that were filled with manic energy and ever more audacious plans, some of which were destined to remain unfulfilled. Whether we finally judge Tsar Peter I to be a cruel tyrant, a brilliant innovator or a bewildering enigma, we cannot deny him his lasting title, Peter 'the Great'.

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CATHERINE I

FROM SERF TO SOVEREIGN

How did an orphaned Lithuanian peasant girl become Russia's first empress?

Words **Greg King**

The first woman to rule Russia in her own right had a history as tangled and troubled as the land she commanded. Empress Catherine I, consort of Peter the Great, never knew her Lithuanian-Polish peasant parents or even the date of her birth, though she assumed it had been in April 1684. She was born Martha Helena Skavronskaya, probably near the Lithuanian-Russian border, and she was orphaned at the age of three. Relatives sent her to Marienburg, where the young girl was immediately put to work, likely as a scullery maid, in the household of a Lutheran pastor, Johann Ernst Glück. Treated as a servant, she was given no education and always remained illiterate.

Martha matured from beautiful young girl to a buxom young woman; worries that her voluptuous appearance might corrupt the Glück household led to her forced marriage, at age 17, to a Swedish dragoon named Johann Rabbe, whose comrades were then occupying Marienburg during their long Great Northern War against Russia. This marriage apparently lasted all of eight days before Russians captured the town and Rabbe and his regiment fled, abandoning his bride to the invaders. The Russians spotted the blonde and buxom Martha and marched her, naked except for a blanket, into their camp. Treated like a possession, she was passed from the bed of one soldier to that of his commander, Field Marshal Boris Sheremetev, who eventually took her back to Moscow.

It was in Moscow that Martha first attracted the attention of Prince Alexander Menshikov; handsome, charming and witty, he had an eye for feminine beauty and is said to have actually purchased Martha from Sheremetev for a ruble. He may have bought her as a sexual plaything, but probably not for himself - he happened to be Tsar Peter's closest friend and was always on the lookout for comely women to occupy his bed. Peter was certainly impressed after meeting her at Menshikov's house. It was more than her appearance: something in Martha's forthright manner and easy laugh appealed to the mercurial tsar and she soon became his mistress.

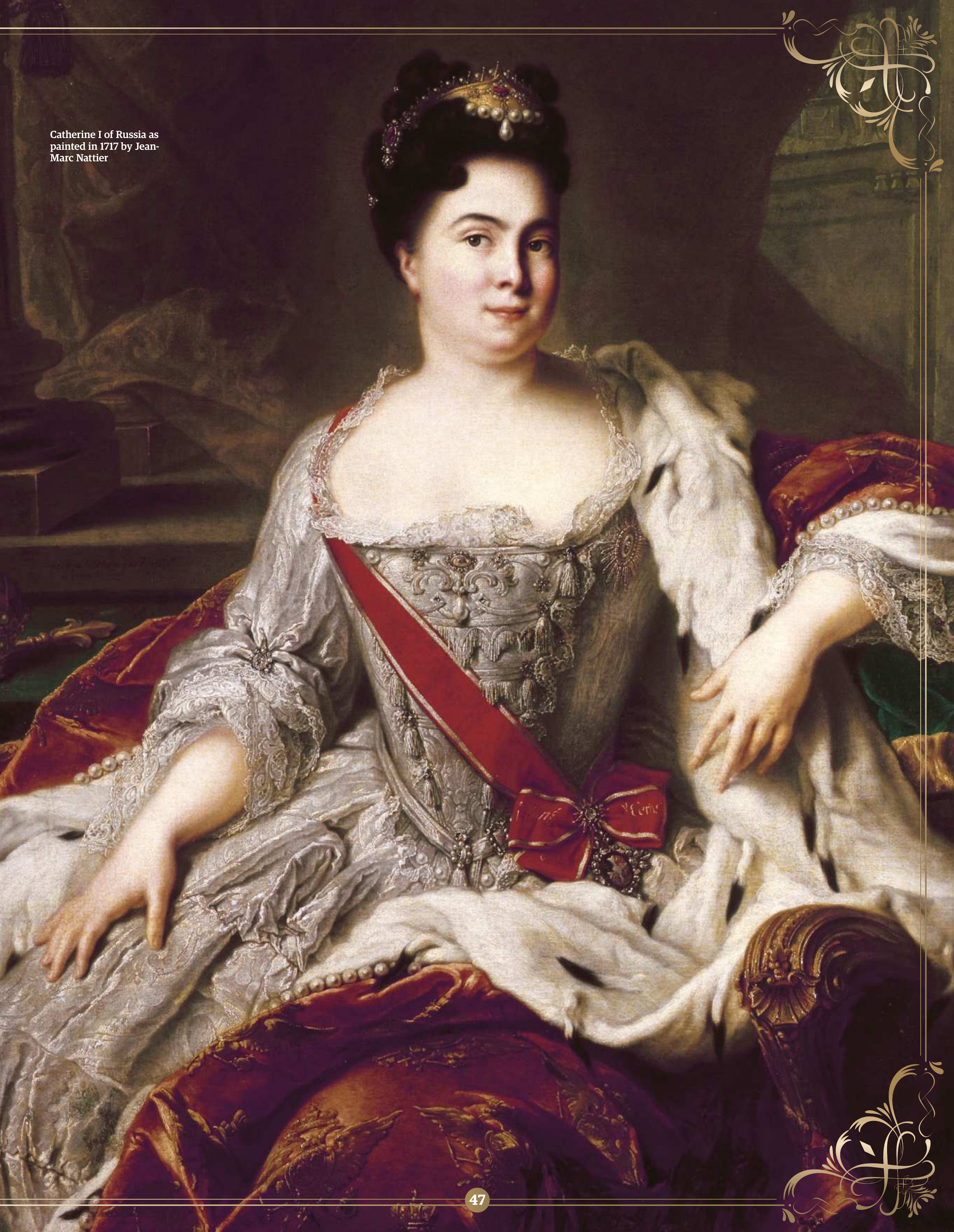
In 1703, Peter had established his new city, St Petersburg, on the Gulf of Finland, and made it the Russian capital; Martha shared his humble three-room log dacha, baking bread, making pickles, washing the laundry and cleaning their house. Peter loved and appreciated her. She couldn't match his intellect or relentless ambition, but she provided him with compassion and care. Martha was the only person who could calm him when he suffered one of his epileptic seizures, holding him and stroking his head until the crisis had passed. She was also one of the few women who could match him drink for drink.

In 1705, Martha converted to Russian Orthodoxy, taking the name of Catherine Alexeievna. As a reward for such devotion, Peter supposedly married her, albeit in secret, sometime in the autumn of 1707. The union, if it occurred, was bigamous - Peter was still married to his first wife, Eudoxia Lopukhina, who remained cloistered in Moscow. In time Catherine bore Peter a total of 12 children. However, all but Anna, born in 1708, and Elizabeth, who arrived the following year, passed away in infancy or childhood.

To Peter, Catherine was 'Mother', or 'Katerinushka'. She never strove for power or demanded gifts, though Peter showered her with estates and jewels. He so hated to be away from her that he often took her on his military campaigns. Once her presence probably saved his life - during a southern expedition, the Russians found themselves surrounded by Ottoman troops. With more men and arms, the Turkish soldiers were ready to pounce when Catherine had an idea: she took off her jewellery and dispatched it to the Ottoman commander, asking that in exchange for this priceless collection he temporarily withdraw his garrison. The bribe worked and the Russians were able to flee the looming danger.

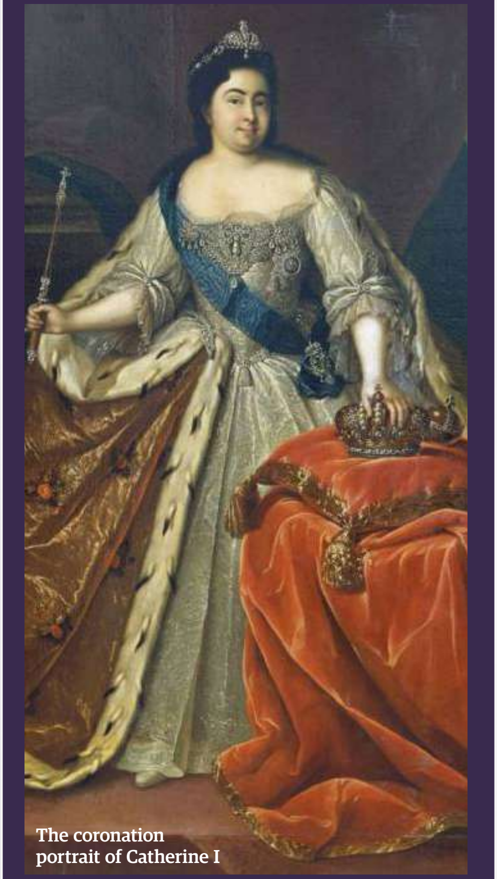
Peter valued such cunning. In 1711, he finally divorced Eudoxia and in February 1712 the tsar officially married Catherine in St Petersburg. The orphaned peasant girl now became tsarina of Russia. At the same time, Peter legitimised their two daughters, Anna and Elizabeth. This new, second family didn't sit well with Tsarevich Alexis, Peter's only surviving child from his first marriage. The conservative and timid Alexis eventually drifted towards conspiracy. When he was brutally tortured to death on his father's orders in 1718, Peter was left with no male heir.

In 1721, to celebrate Russia's victory over Sweden in the Great Northern War, Peter declared his country to be an empire, and he named himself emperor in place of the old term 'tsar', meaning that Catherine thus became Russia's first empress.


Catherine I of Russia as painted in 1717 by Jean-Marc Nattier

AN EMPRESS IS CROWNED

The coronation that set the standard for the Romanov dynasty



The coronation portrait of Catherine I

In May 1724, Catherine became the first woman to be crowned ruler of Russia and Peter the Great used the ceremony to reinforce his embrace of all things Western. Though held in Moscow's Cathedral of the Assumption, the coronation dispensed with tradition. The empress wore a French-inspired dress and a golden mantle sewn with pearls as she knelt before her husband.

Previously, the patriarch of the Orthodox Church had crowned sovereigns, signifying that their power came from God. Now, Peter placed the new crown of more than 2,000 diamonds, pearls and rubies on his wife's head. The message was clear and would be repeated by Peter's successors: sovereigns did not need the intervention of the Church to confer the divine sanction they believed existed within them since birth.

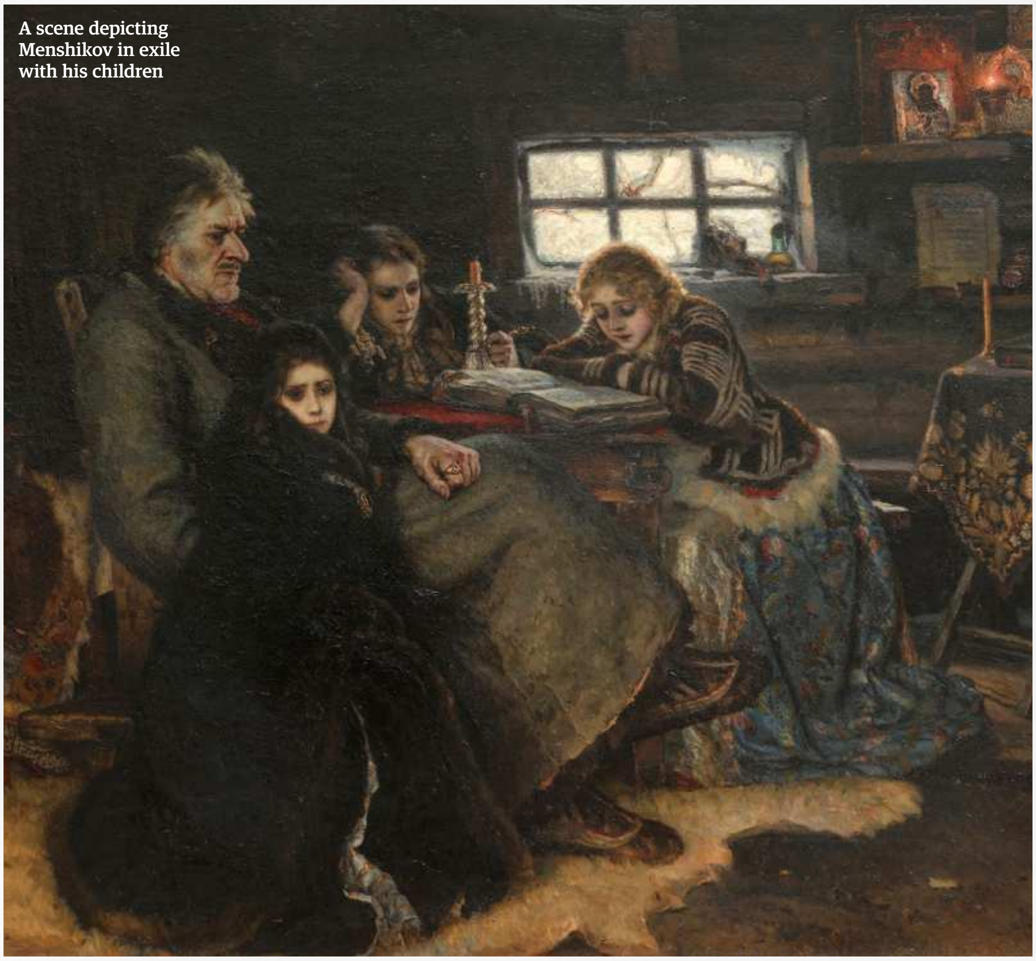
The coronation also set the pattern for the ceremonies that would follow until 1896: firework displays, military reviews, grand processions and feasts were all meant to evoke the grandeur of the imperial throne and emphasise the link between the Romanovs and their subjects.

In 1724, Peter took her to Moscow and had her crowned in a ceremony fusing Western rituals with Orthodox rites. Catherine was also named co-ruler and appointed Peter's successor in his will.

But Catherine's apparent triumph was tenuous. Peter took a new mistress, Princess Maria Cantemir of Moldavia, in 1720 and two years later she gave birth to a son who shared the royal blood of both of his parents. Peter needed a male heir. If he divorced Catherine, he could marry Maria and legitimise their child, as he had done with Anna and Elizabeth, and thus provide his empire with a male successor. When Catherine got wind of this possibility - or so court gossips whispered - she dispatched her own physician to treat the infant. Soon the baby was dead, supposedly poisoned on the orders of Catherine.

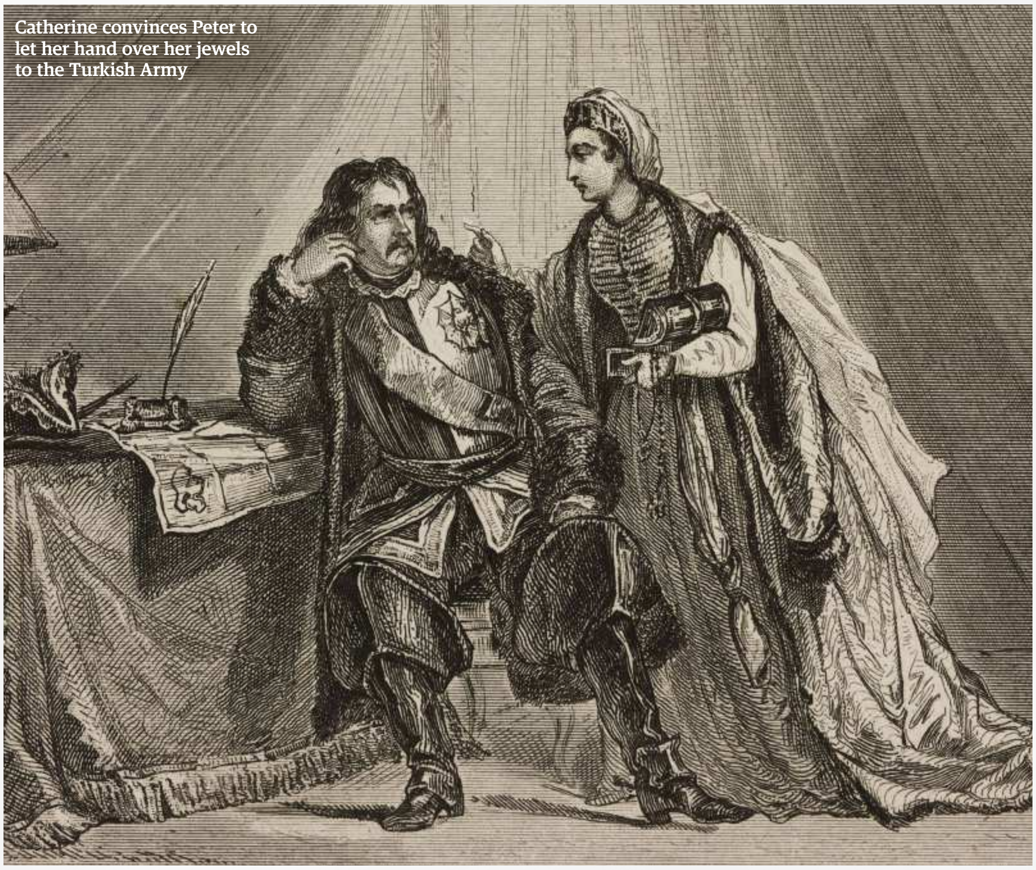
Catherine had good reason to worry about her fate - especially when she formed a friendship with court chamberlain Willem Mons and his sister Matriona. Not only was Mons the brother of one of Peter's former mistresses, but he and his sister were unsubtle in their attempts to sell access to the empress. Peter suspected infidelity, for Mons was, according to one diplomat, "the handsomest man I have ever seen". Spies watched Catherine's every move, and her jealous husband once threatened her by smashing a mirror, shouting, "I made you and I can unmake you just as easily as this!" Eventually wrath got the better of him: Peter had Mons tortured and beheaded, then deliberately took his wife to the scene. But Catherine gave nothing away. "It's a pity when chamberlains have so many vices," was her only comment on seeing his severed head on a pike. As an added rebuke, Peter had the head preserved in a jar and ordered his wife to keep it on a shelf.

After the Mons affair, Peter tore up the will that named Catherine as his successor. For several months, emperor and empress did not speak to each other, but they did manage a sort-of reconciliation when Peter fell ill in autumn 1724. Suffering from a blocked urinary tract, he lingered on in great pain for several months with gangrene of the bladder. In his last moments, he supposedly muttered, "Leave all to..." before lapsing into a coma.

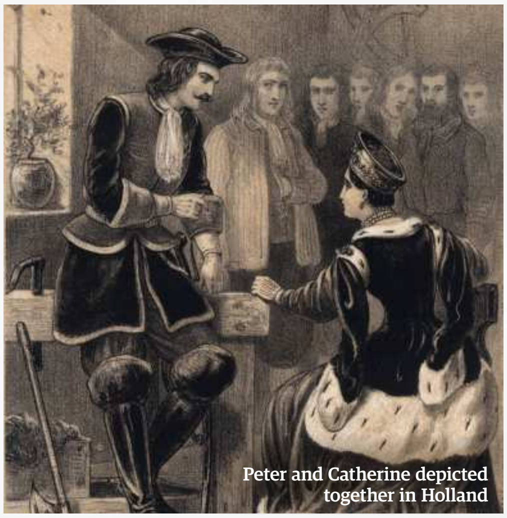


A scene depicting Menshikov in exile with his children

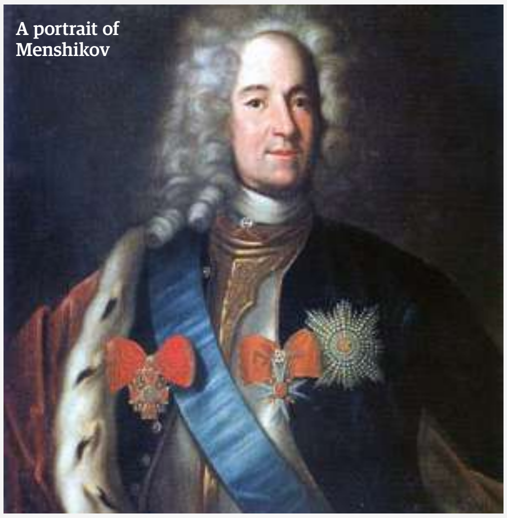
> "PETER HAD THE HEAD PRESERVED IN A JAR AND ORDERED HIS WIFE TO KEEP IT ON A SHELF"



Catherine convinces Peter to let her hand over her jewels to the Turkish Army



Peter and Catherine depicted together in Holland



A portrait of Menshikov

On 8 February 1725, he finally died at the age of 52.

The next emperor should have been Peter's grandson, also named Peter, but he was not even ten, a product of conservative Moscow, and thus the likely pawn of those who wished to erode the empire's advances. It was Menshikov who took matters into his own hands. Catherine, he argued to the Holy Synod, had already been crowned empress; he assured the Imperial Senate that she had learned how to rule at her late husband's side; he told the Imperial Guards Regiments that she would continue Peter's reforming ways. It was a bold move: Russia would be asked to accept a commoner, a foreigner and a woman as ruler. Yet the entrenched powers agreed that it was better to back Catherine and the promise of continuity than risk the unknown young Peter.

Catherine was empress, but it was Menshikov, as her principal adviser, who wielded most of the power. He was canny enough to recognise that keeping the army's support was vital to her survival on the throne. The Imperial Army was the largest in Europe, and the cost was borne by taxes on peasants and serfs; already impoverished, they often failed to meet obligations and when this happened, the soldiers did not get paid. Catherine met the problem head-on - she slashed the head tax on serfs, forgave debts and ensured that the army remained loyal by paying back wages. These measures won Catherine support among her people; they admired her lack of artifice and how proudly she spoke of her peasant roots.

Peter the Great's reforms remained on the books, even if Catherine did nothing to expand them - a coherent political program was not her forte. Indeed, her reign actually saw a rise in the sort of graft that Peter had so despised, and she gradually fell into a kind of enchanted malaise. More and more she was concerned only with court revelries, played out against the veneer of Western sophistication that Peter had imposed on his reluctant country.

Often Catherine did not rise until five in the afternoon, and would then spend the next 12 hours attending balls, playing cards, dancing and dining to excess. She could still match most men drink for drink, although courtiers occasionally found their empress collapsed in a stupor beneath a table. They grew to detest these nights: if Catherine disliked someone's clothing or manners, she made them drink vodka until they passed out. Although she grew increasingly stout - one visitor described her as "a graceless, slatternly woman who waddled like a duck" - she was voracious in her sexual appetites. She took a young chamberlain as her lover, but he soon collapsed from exhaustion.

Luckily for some, Catherine's rule lasted for just 16 months. In the spring of 1727 she fell ill with tuberculosis and lingered on in agony before dying on 17 May at the age of 43. Continuity had justified her rule; ironically, her death led to a decade of dynastic chaos.

THE SUPREME PRIVY COUNCIL

Catherine's most significant contribution to Russia ironically slashed away at Peter the Great's reforms

For the most part, Catherine followed the programme set out by Peter the Great, careful to maintain his reforms and move Russia into the 18th century. Among those innovations had been the creation of the Holy Synod, the Imperial Senate and the Twelve Colleges, the latter devoted to each of the government ministries. By dividing authority and administrative duties, Peter had hoped to weaken concentrated influence and corruption. But Catherine's one innovation, the creation of the Supreme Privy Council in 1726, undermined these intentions. Catherine named six aristocrats to the council, which was to opine on issues of national importance and make policy decisions, provided that they did not infringe on the empress' prerogatives. In practical terms, the Council usurped the power of Peter's administrative bodies and rendered them impotent. The corruption that followed was so blatant that, in 1730, the Council was disbanded.

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PETER II

A CRISIS OF SUCCESSION

Who could fill the enormous void left by Peter the Great?

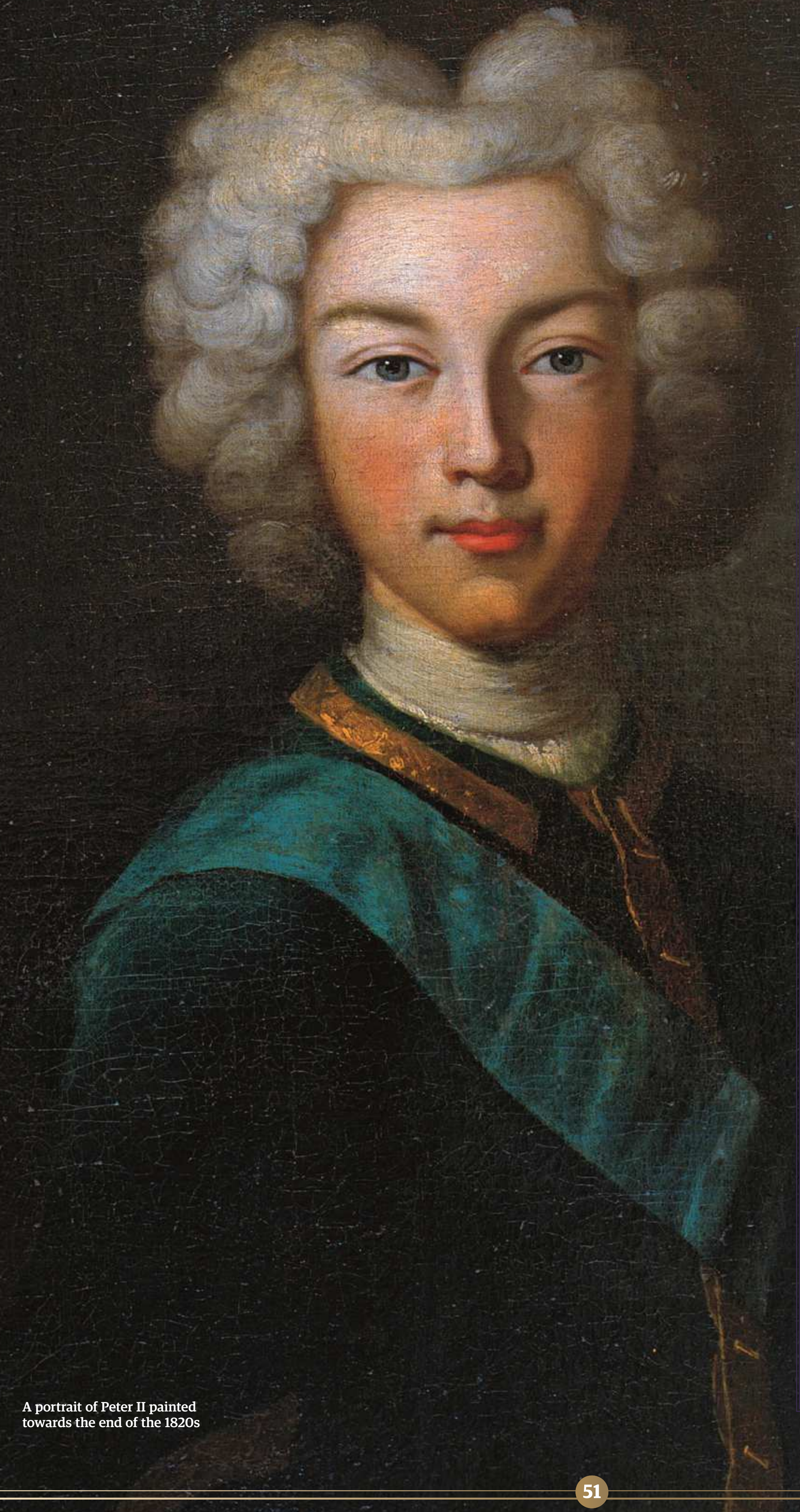
Words **Derek Wilson**

"Unless the Empire of Russia rouses itself from under the lethargic slumber which it is now fallen into, their furred gowns and long petticoats will return upon them and all the sordid affectation of a singularity from all the world, which made them so truly contemptible before, will do the like again." So one foreign observer, reporting on the reign of Peter II, gloomily prophesied. The revolution of Peter the Great's reign had been carried through by the iron will of one man and imposed by draconian laws. But the tsar was only human. What he had done could be undone - either by reactionary forces or chaos caused by rival political factions. Peter had established the right of the ruler to name his/her successor but had not, in fact, done so. His only potential male heirs were still minors. Apart from them the immediate family consisted of Peter's wife and two daughters. Children or women? Both were untrained to rule. Both were sure to be manipulated by unscrupulous advisers.

The most prominent of those advisers was Alexander Menshikov, who in 1725 became de facto ruler. He owed his rise to the friendship of the tsar and even closer friendship of the tsar's wife, Catherine. Menshikov, who had amassed his own considerable fortune by diverting large sums of state money to his own coffers, knew his survival depended on Catherine continuing to rule. He obtained the backing of the state council as well as two crack regiments of the army, the Preobrazhensky Guard and the Semonovski Guard. This was sufficient to ensure that Peter the Great's widow became Empress Catherine I of Russia.

For the next two years the general direction of state policy - though not its momentum - was maintained. Menshikov formed the Supreme Secret Council of personal advisers to deal with 'matters of exceptional significance'. But Catherine was no cypher. She personally supervised the continuance of her husband's modernising policies. In one matter, however, she struck out on her own. Peter had lavished enormous resources on his military machine. Numbering 230,000, his army was the largest in Europe. It was extremely expensive to maintain and was largely responsible for the considerable tax burden imposed on the populace. Catherine, herself of humble origins, was determined to reduce this burden and made significant savings in the military budget. But this Petrine afterglow faded in May 1727, when Catherine died of tuberculosis. If Menshikov was to retain effective power he had to control the empress's successor. The obvious candidate from his point of view - and the last direct male heir of Peter the Great - was the 11-year-old son of the disgraced 'traitor', Alexis. As well as his tender years, Peter suffered from one massive disadvantage - his grandfather hated him. He came from tainted stock and in the tsar's mind, represented the old Russia, ever scheming to reassert itself. To Tsar Peter his grandson was a non-person. In 1721, when he bestowed the title of tsarevni on his daughters, the boy was ignored and not granted the honorific tsesarevich. Young Peter's self-esteem must have been at a low ebb and this manifested itself in a lazy and lethargic personality. As long as there was any prospect of Catherine providing an alternative male heir, his grandson was of no interest to the tsar. She did, indeed, have eight sons but all of them died in infancy. There was no question of providing the boy with the sort of education a ruler would need. After the death of both his parents before he was four, Peter was put into the care of a Dutch couple and received little more than basic tutoring.

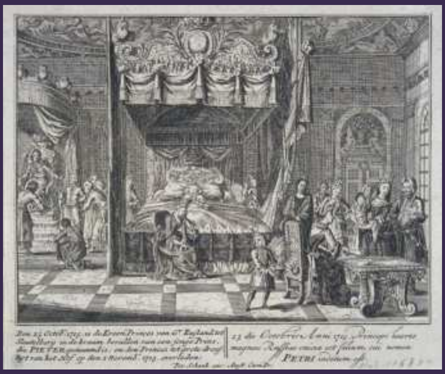
Only in 1722 did the tsar wake up to the possibility that the crown might one day fall to Peter Alexeyevich. It was about this time that the seven-year-old's upbringing was entrusted to the German councillor and diplomat, Heinrich Osterman. Beyond that his grandfather continued to show little interest in him. It was the ever-astute Menshikov who, with an eye to the future, brought the boy closer to the centre of affairs. He planned to ally himself closely with the royal family by plotting a marriage between Peter and his own daughter. As soon as Catherine died he produced a forged will nominating Peter II and whisked the boy away to his own palace. But Menshikov's luck was running out. For a short while at the beginning of the new reign he dominated the court and behaved, some said, more autocratically than Peter the Great. But the new tsar did not like him and, without the protection of the empress, Menshikov was vulnerable to rivals.



A portrait of Peter II painted towards the end of the 1820s

PETER II AND THE DOLGORUKOVS

The scheming family



An engraving depicting the proclamation of Peter II as tsar

The political in-fighting that followed the death of Catherine brought to the fore Alexis Dolgorukov, a senior member of the empress's household whose responsibilities included overseeing the education of the future tsar. Originally an ally of Menshikov, he studied how to supplant him. He engineered the removal of the tsar from Menshikov's palace and brought him to Moscow, which quickly superseded St Petersburg as the Russian capital. Peter now spent much of his time with Alexis's family. His son, Ivan, a rakehell, introduced the teenager to feasting, gambling, heavy drinking and whoring. Catherine Dolgarukova, Alexis's daughter, three years older than Peter, played on his affections and the couple's engagement was announced. The tsar was kept away from the council while the dominant clique pursued their own interests. Good government fell into abeyance. One matter Peter did attend to with relish was the downfall of his previous mentor, Menshikov. In 1727 the minister was stripped of his titles and lands and he and his family were exiled to Siberia. Peter did not oppose his grandfather's reforms but his failure to support them enabled some of them to fall into abeyance, which was undoubtedly what the traditionalist Dulgorukovs intended. But their treatment of the young tsar backfired. His dissolute way of life undermined his health. At the end of 1729 he succumbed to smallpox and on 30 January 1730 (the eve of his intended marriage to Catherine Dolgorukova) he died. Then it was the turn of her family to be driven into exile.

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ANNA

A CRUEL COURT

The second woman to rule Russia earned a reputation for cruelty, but her reign actually witnessed some notable achievements

Words **Greg King**

Peter II's premature death threw the Russian succession into chaos. The Supreme Privy Council dismissed the idea of selecting Peter the Great's daughter Elizabeth: she had been born out of wedlock and her mother had been a Lithuanian peasant. Instead, they turned to the daughters of Ivan V, Peter the Great's deceased half-brother. Catherine, the eldest daughter, had married (and was publicly separated from) the duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, and so the council opted for her widowed sister Anna, Duchess of Courland.

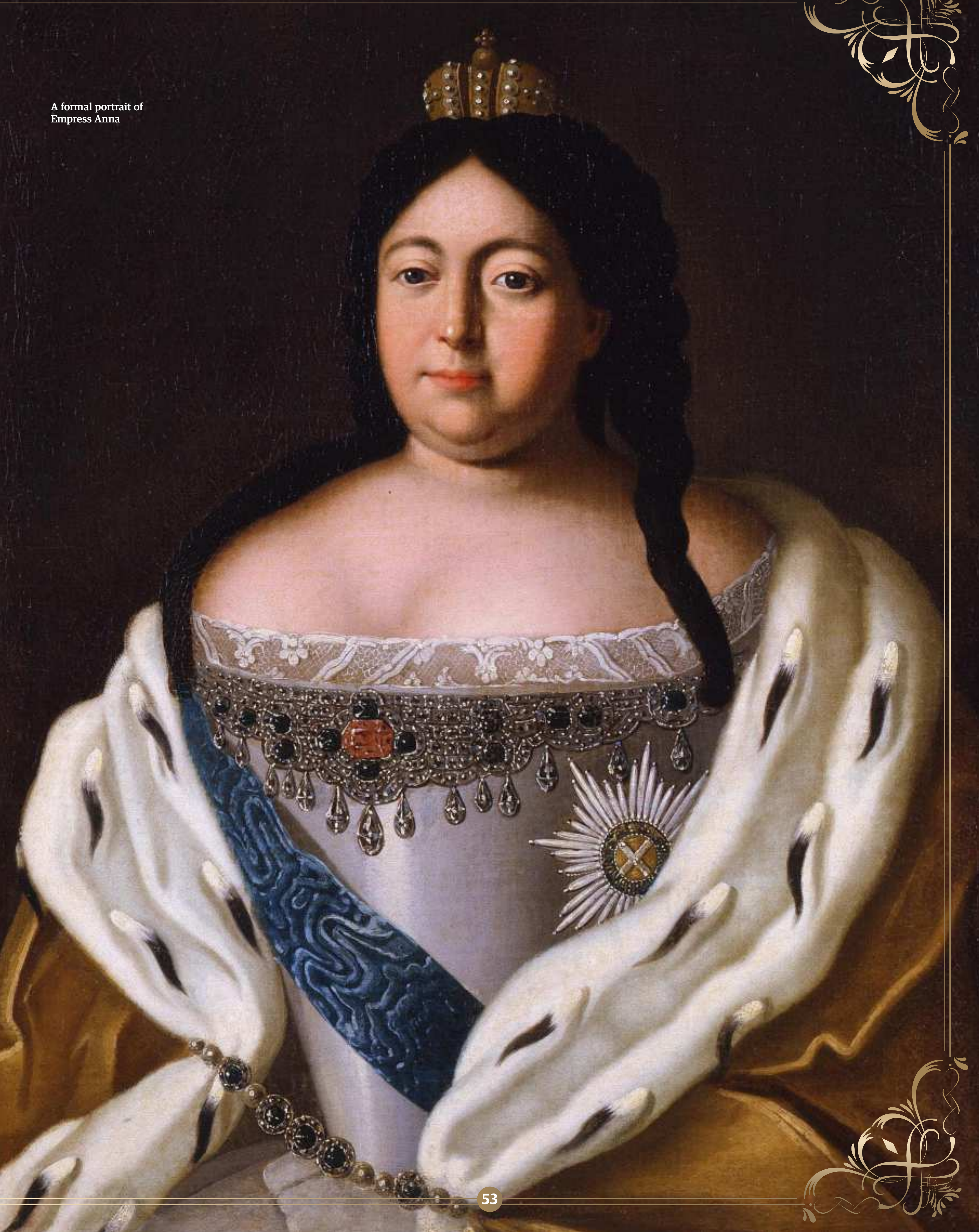
Born in 1693, Anna Ivanovna was three when her mentally feeble father died and her uncle Peter became sole ruler. Raised in isolation according to the rigid standards of her mother Praskovia, Anna was well educated for her time, studying German, French and Russian history, but a childhood imbued with tradition, religion and stringent morality left her rough around the edges. She was so imperious and obstinate that wags nicknamed her 'Iv-Anna the Terrible.'

In 1708 Peter the Great ordered Anna and her mother to move to St Petersburg. The previously shy Anna blossomed at court, and was greatly impressed by the splendour she encountered. At court festivities she made an indelible impression: taller than most men and with a tendency to stoutness, Anna had a dark complexion and hair, blue eyes, and a deep, booming voice. No-one accused her of being a great beauty: writer Thomas Carlyle once compared her puffy cheeks to a "Westphalian ham." Still, Peter I was determined to marry her off to political advantage, and in 1710 he arranged for her to wed Friedrich Wilhelm, Duke of Courland, a province in modern Latvia. The ceremony was a barbaric bacchanal, with excessive drinking, stomping on tables, and dwarfs leaping out of enormous pies.

Anna and her husband did not set off for Courland until early 1711. Their carriage was just a day out of St Petersburg when Friedrich Wilhelm collapsed and died, allegedly from alcohol poisoning after a riotous night of drinking. Anna was condemned to a life as dowager duchess of Courland, ruling the province according to the dictates of her uncle the tsar. To ensure that she followed his wishes, the tsar dispatched Count Peter Bestuzhev-Ryumin, one of his trusted courtiers, to act as her adviser. He found Anna miserable, constantly short of funds and lonely; he solved the latter dilemma by becoming her lover. This situation changed when a new figure appeared at Anna's court: this was Ernst Johann Biron, a poor but handsome aristocrat with a rudimentary education but a winning smile and a crafty, ingratiating personality. He quickly turned Anna against Bestuzhev-Ryumin, convincing her that the count was swindling her meagre court, and is believed to have replaced him in her bed. Apparently it was to disguise this situation that, in 1723, Anna arranged his marriage to one of her ladies-in-waiting.

Even before Peter II died, the Supreme Privy Council had approached Anna, offering to recognise her as rightful heir to the Russian throne. Her biggest asset, as far as these aristocrats were concerned, was that she was a childless widow and could therefore easily be controlled. Indeed, they made Anna sign a document that would severely limit her power. She agreed to govern according to their dictates; to not declare war, make peace, impose new taxes or even authorise expenditures without the council's approval. Aristocrats were not to be punished or exiled unless tried and convicted by their fellow nobles; estates and serfs could not be granted by the Crown; and the council had to approve all officials. Finally, the document spelled out that Anna could not marry without forfeiting the throne, and dictated that the council, not the empress, would select her successor.

So desperate was Anna to escape her glum and impoverished life in Courland that she willingly agreed to these unprecedented demands. Within a week of signing the document, word came that Peter II had died and Anna set off for Moscow, which the late emperor had re-established as the country's capital. A power struggle soon occurred. Leaders of the army and nobles warned Anna that



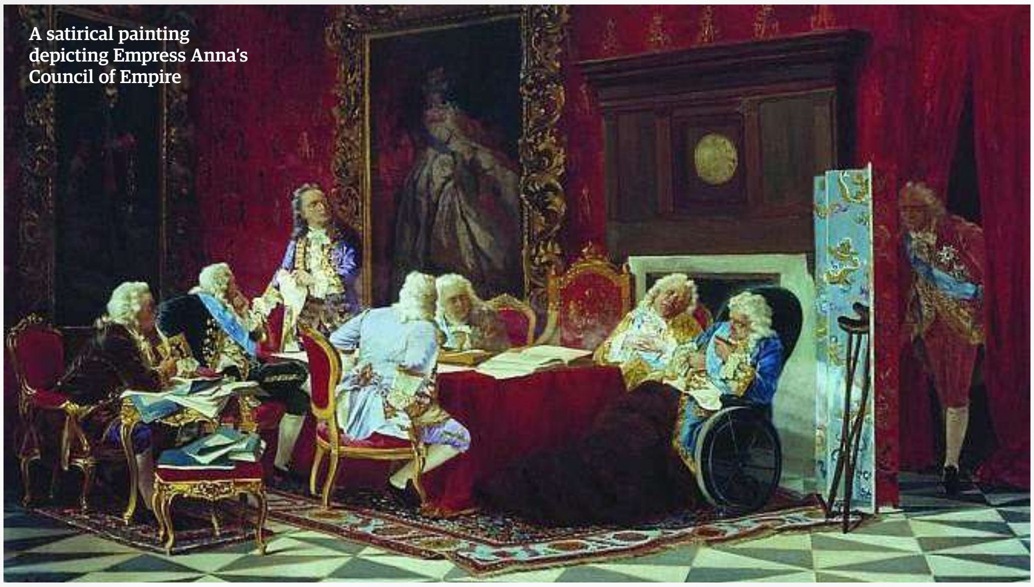
A formal portrait of Empress Anna

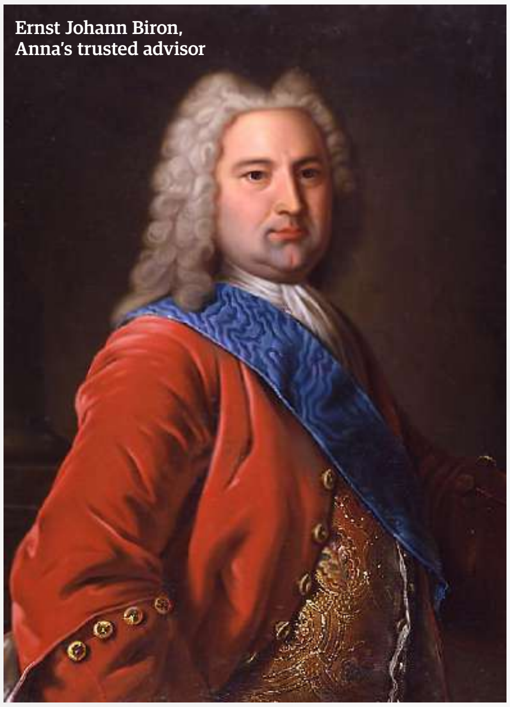
aristocrats on the Supreme Privy Council like the Dolgorukys and Golitsyns had limited her power to increase their own. Anna listened. On 20 February 1730, in a move worthy of Ivan the Terrible, the new empress disbanded the Supreme Privy Council, arrested half of its members and sent them to Siberia, tore up the agreement and declared that she would rule as "the sole voice of the autocratic power, answerable to God."

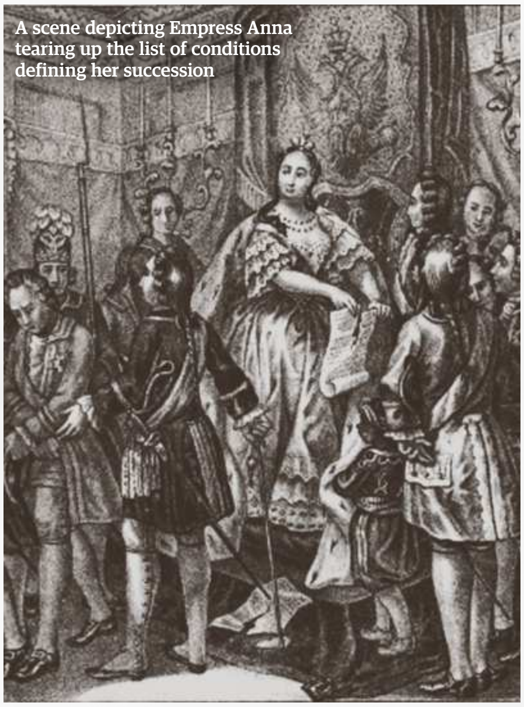
Thus began a decade of rule in which Anna and her German coterie ruled Russia. Biron might no longer have shared her bed, but she named him grand chancellor at her court and he served as her principal adviser, with foreign affairs handed over to Andrei Osterman and military questions directed by General Burkhardt Münnich. Not unnaturally Russians resented this; it is undoubtedly true that Biron was corrupt and used his position to enrich himself through bribes. But he also offered sound advice and competent administration, something largely unknown in the empire.

Anna moved the capital back to St Petersburg and set about continuing Peter the Great's vision. The Fortress of St Peter and St Paul was completed, along with the Twelve Colleges, while streets were paved with cobbles and stone bridges were constructed across canals. She greatly expanded funding of Peter's Academy of Science, importing professors from Germany to lecture on mathematics, botany, astronomy and navigation. Under her rule, Russians began making expeditions to the Bering Sea, investigating ethnographic migration in Siberia and whether a land bridge had ever linked Asia to North America.

Anna's reign was not quite the dark era her enemies would portray. The state invested heavily in mining and led the world in iron production. Although she herself was not particularly gifted, she appreciated the arts and was an enthusiastic patron. She brought Italian singers and composers to St Petersburg to perform the first operas the country ever witnessed, and she became an early admirer of the ballet. At her direction in 1738, Her Majesty's Dancing School was founded to train the


A satirical painting depicting Empress Anna's Council of Empire

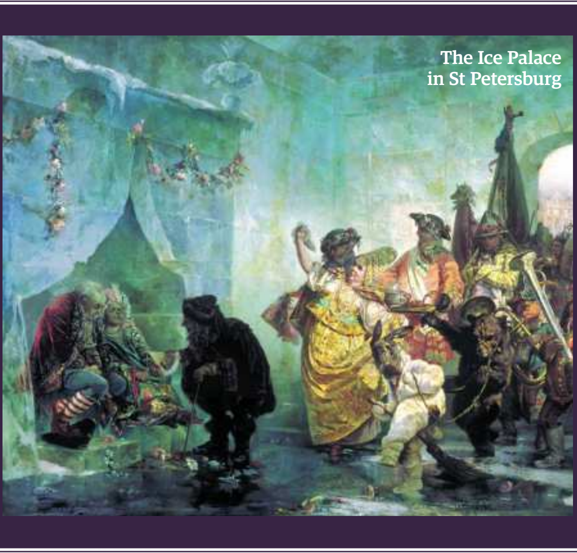

Ernst Johann Biron, Anna's trusted advisor

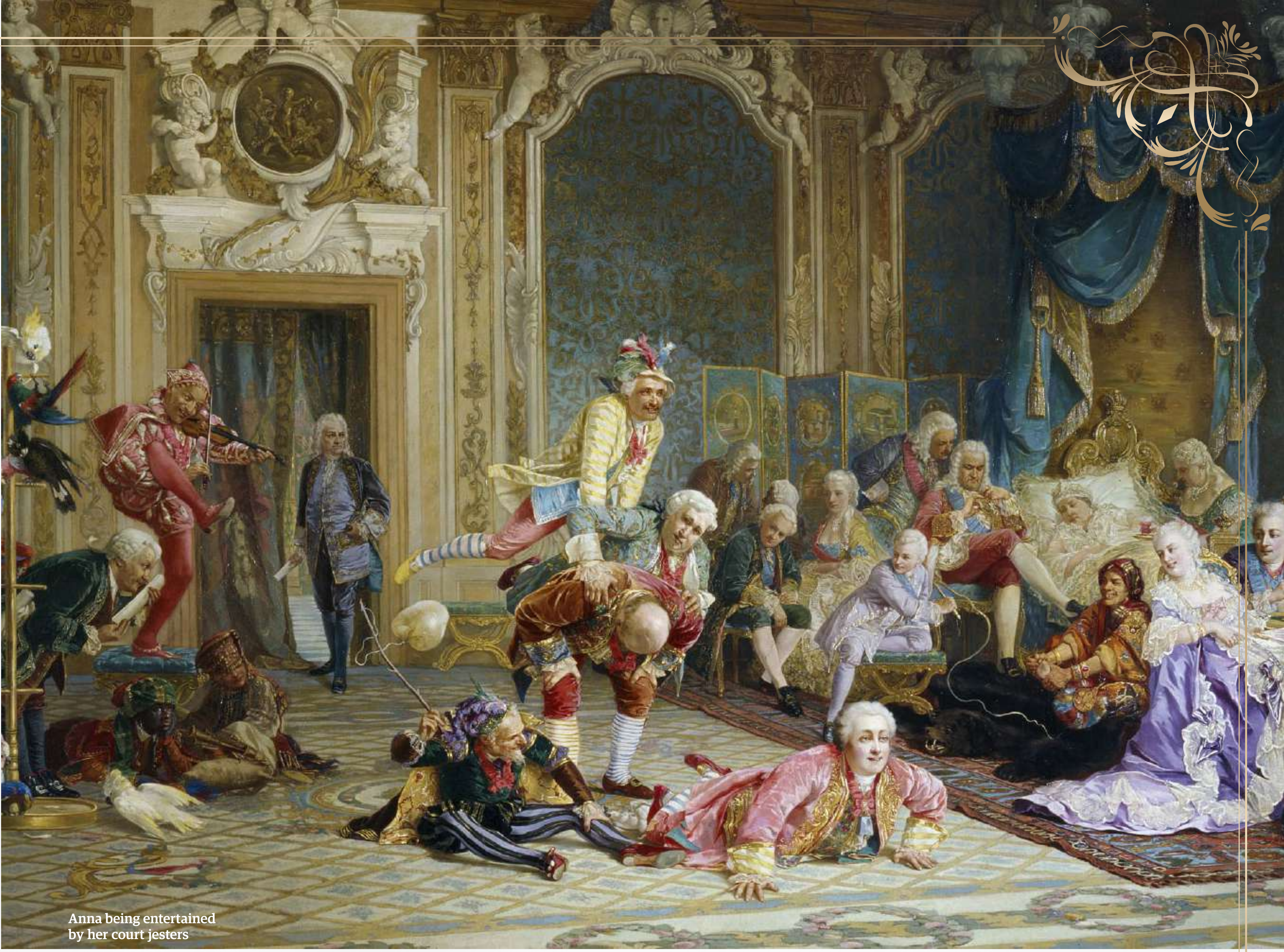

A scene depicting Empress Anna tearing up the list of conditions defining her succession

THE ICE PALACE

Anna's most notorious act of cruelty involved a forced marriage and a fantastic palace built of ice

The most bizarre event in Empress Anna's reign took place in February 1740. She was infuriated when Prince Mikhail Golitsyn married a Catholic; when his wife died prematurely, Anna decided to take her revenge and force him to remarry. She selected the most unattractive woman she could find, an elderly Kalmyk maid named Avdotya Buzheninova, as his new bride. A palace made of ice blocks was built on the frozen Neva River: complete with ice parapets, furniture and even chandeliers, this frosty abode was meant for the couple's honeymoon. After the wedding, during which the doors of the church were locked to prevent Golitsyn from fleeing, Anna arranged the reception in a stable, with an unappetising menu of horse flesh washed down with fermented mare's milk as a jester read a poem describing the newlyweds as fools. Anna forced them, dressed as clowns, to ride in a cage atop an elephant through the streets to the palace and locked them naked in the bedroom, with its bed of ice, telling them that if they wished to survive they should make love. They only managed to survive when a maid traded a pearl necklace for a sheepskin coat and smuggled it to the freezing couple.


The Ice Palace in St Petersburg


Anna being entertained by her court jesters

young children of court servants; as the Academy of Russian Ballet, the institution would become famous throughout the world. She also established the Imperial Cadet Corps, a military institute to train the sons of nobles for future positions in the army; the first fire brigades in St Petersburg and Moscow; and Russia's first postal service.

At the same time, though, Anna strengthened the aristocracy and eased their obligations to the state. The mandatory period of military service was reduced, and families were allowed to exempt one son from the obligation to ensure the well-being of their estates. The yoke around serfs was tightened: new taxes and decrees made them actual property of their masters. The empress also restored the notorious Secret Chancellery, charged with rooting out suspected enemies through torture and exile.

Anna's court was a paradox, hovering uneasily between drunken debaucheries and European refinement. She ordered a new Winter Palace constructed, and indulged her taste for luxury in lavish spectacles that rivalled Bourbon France. There were elegant new gowns and liveried servants, but appearances were deceptive: palaces were infested with lice and rats, and more often than not courtiers wore tattered, reeking undergarments beneath their imported clothing. And while the empress enjoyed ballet and opera, she also shared the barbaric tastes of her Muscovite ancestors, creating an unsettling carnival atmosphere with a succession of giants, dwarfs, cripples, trained pigs, and goats dressed in frilly outfits who wandered through the palace. Her cruelty revealed itself in distasteful ways. Anna ordered her ladies to engage in fights that ended only when hair was pulled and blood had been drawn; she made courtiers dress as animals and crow, cackle and crawl before bemused audiences. And she had an unrelenting thirst for hunting: loaded rifles stood in all rooms so that Anna could shoot at birds or animals from the windows. When the weather turned bad, the unfortunate prey was set loose in the palace, with Anna thumping along after them as shots rang through the halls.

> “SHE SHARED THE BARBARIC TASTES OF HER ANCESTORS”

During Anna's reign Russia fought two major conflicts; the War of the Polish Succession and the Russo-Turkish War. The first followed the death of King Augustus II, when France, Sweden and Turkey tried to replace the rightful heir with Stanisław Leszczyński as their hand-picked puppet. Allied with Austria, Russia opposed this planned coup and ultimately prevailed in seeing the king's son crowned as Augustus III. The second was a more tortured endeavour, lasting four years and costing Russia 100,000 men. The empire gained only the city of Azov, and there was widespread discontent over Münnich's leadership.

Throughout 1740 Anna's health deteriorated: she suffered from gout and painful kidney stones. Doctors could do nothing and she died in great agony in October at the age of 47. Her legacy was mixed: she had continued Peter the Great's reforms while also indulging in personal excess and petty amusements. She had not quite been the reactionary imbecile her enemies suggested: indeed, a fair bit of nationalistic xenophobia as well as sexism drove many of the complaints about her and her team of German advisers. Yet Anna ultimately failed in her principal task: to bring stability to her troubled empire.

©Getty

IVAN VI

THE LOST TSAR

Ruling Russia has never been an easy job, so when a babe in arms inherited the throne, tragedy wasn't far behind

Words **Catherine Curzon**

When Ivan VI inherited the Russian throne in the early months of his infancy, you might imagine this meant he was set for life. Power, privilege, wealth and territory would be his to command. If he could just make it through childhood, then Ivan would rule one of the greatest superpowers of the 18th century. Yet in the legendary Romanov court, such glittering prizes were right at the top of everybody's wish list, and ambition and intrigue ruled the day.

Ivan was born into the illustrious house of Brunswick-Bevern as the son of Prince Antony Ulrich of Brunswick-Lüneburg and Anna Leopoldovna of Russia. As granddaughter of Ivan V and niece of the current Empress Anna, Anna Leopoldovna was at the heart of Russian royalty. Everyone at court knew that the empress was not in the best of health and, all around, courtiers, favourites and politicians were jockeying for position. Should the empress die before little Ivan reached adulthood then a regent would be needed, and though his mother was the obvious choice to rule, it wasn't a forgone conclusion.

Although Anna did name the newborn Ivan as her successor to the throne, she didn't select his mother as regent. Instead, that role went to the empress's favourite courtier and rumoured lover, Ernst Johann von Biron. Biron had long schemed for the position, yet he would live to regret it. When Empress Anna died in 1740, little Ivan was just two months old. It might seem unthinkable to us now, but this innocent infant was about to become a pawn in one of the darkest intrigues of the Russian court. Without committing any crime, Ivan would face a terrible punishment that he would be forced to endure for his entire life.

Having lobbied long and hard to win the role of regent, Biron held onto the position for just a month. He had not been a popular choice from the off and when Anna Leopoldovna mounted a coup and usurped him, nobody was in the least bit disappointed.

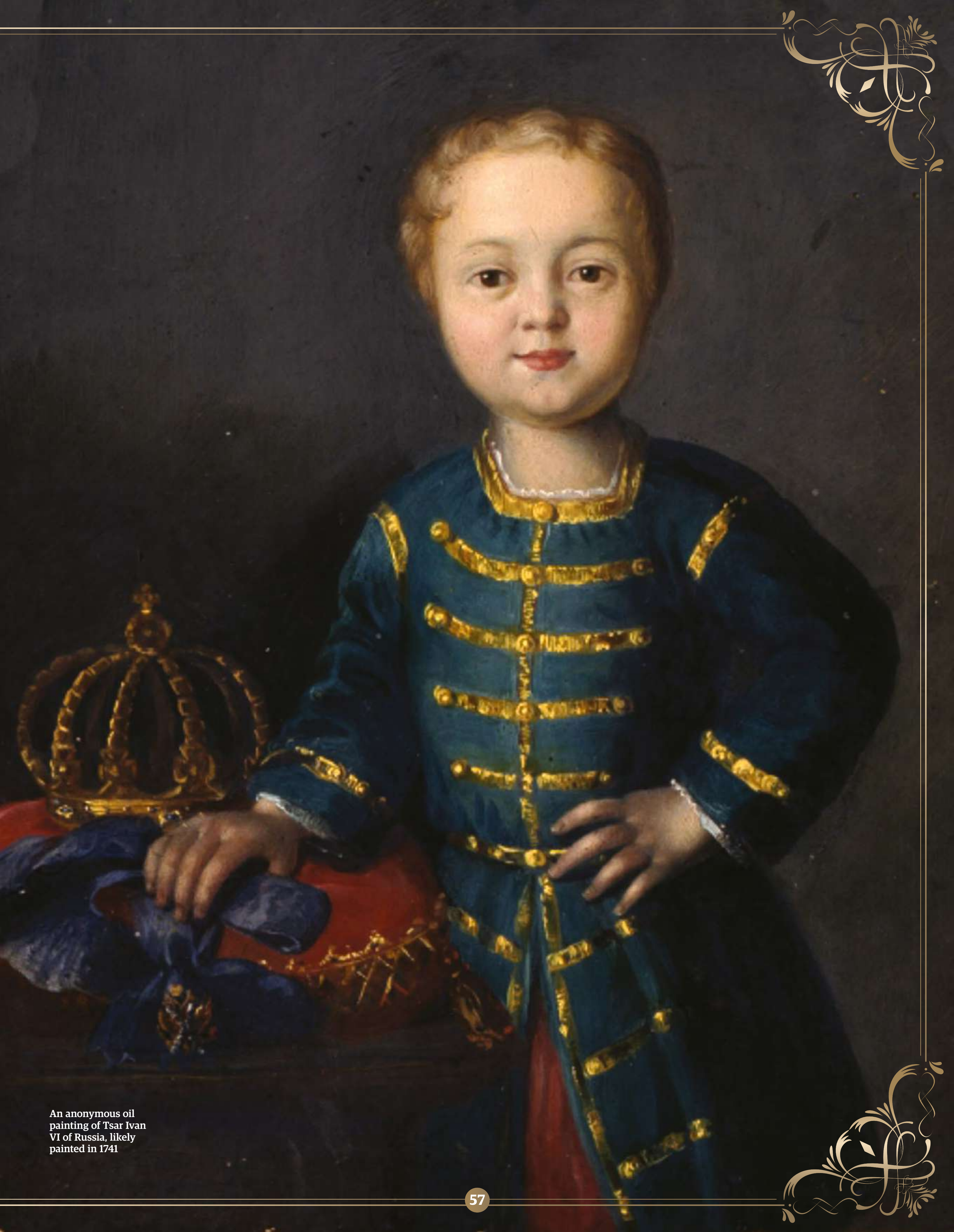
With Ivan's mother now in the seat of power, she assumed the title grand duchess, no doubt feeling rather secure in her new role. Biron, meanwhile, was sentenced to death by a court-martial, though Anna Leopoldovna commuted the sentence to exile and sent the once-influential courtier off to Siberia.

It was all far too smooth and easy to be the end of the matter. Having staged a coup of her own, Anna Leopoldovna had taken her eye off the ball. In fact, she would only last 12 months in the top job, having reckoned with a powerful and ambitious royal lady.

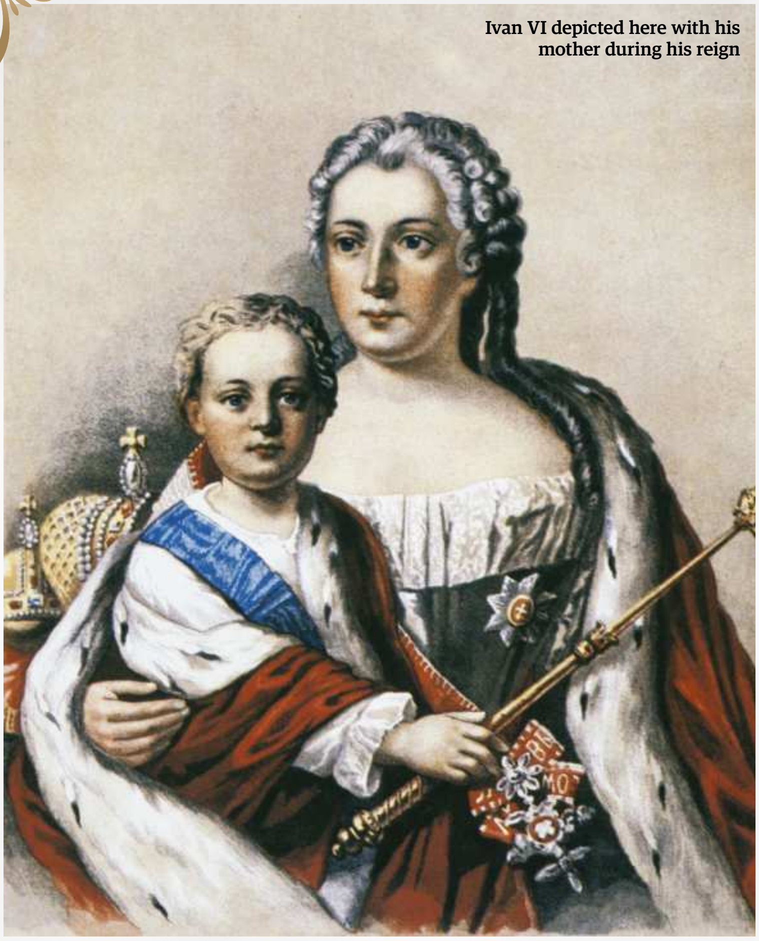
Elizabeth Petrovna, the daughter of Peter the Great, was not about to sit around and lose the throne that she believed was her birthright. However, unlike Anna Leopoldovna, she didn't rush to take action but instead took her time, moving and shaking behind the scenes at court. Over the year of Anna Leopoldovna's reign, Elizabeth Petrovna worked to cement alliances, exploiting her father's legacy, her family name and every chink she saw in the armour of the regent.

Blessed with a keen political eye, Elizabeth watched with satisfaction as the people of Russia grew more and more dissatisfied with the new regime. Taxes soared, the economy dipped and across the land people grew poor, hungry and miserable. The canny Elizabeth shrewdly capitalised on her late father's popularity with the armed forces too, laying the foundations for the moment when she would seize power. She became close to senior guardsmen, was personally known to many officers and was considered a good friend by the guards. All of this goodwill would prove invaluable when, in late 1741, she donned a metal breastplate and prepared to seize the throne of Russia.

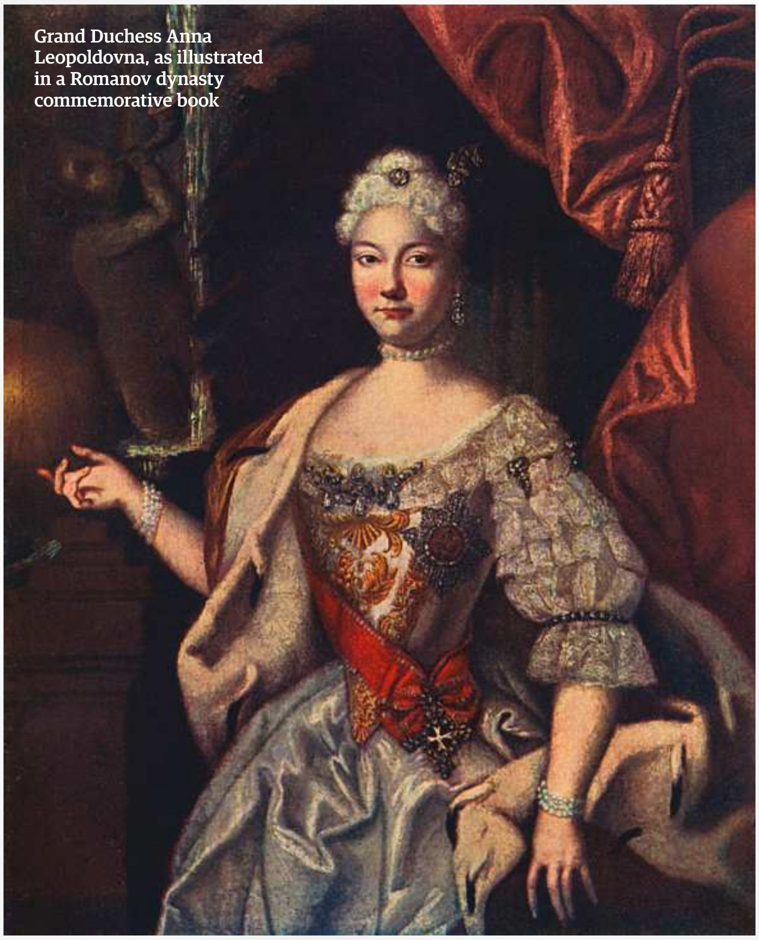
With the fiercely loyal Preobrazhensky Regiment at her side and a silver cross clutched in her hand, Elizabeth Petrovna marched on the Winter Palace. In a remarkably bloodless coup,



An anonymous oil painting of Tsar Ivan VI of Russia, likely painted in 1741



Ivan VI depicted here with his mother during his reign



Grand Duchess Anna Leopoldovna, as illustrated in a Romanov dynasty commemorative book

“IVAN HAD NO IDEA THAT HIS MOTHER AND FATHER WERE BEING KEPT JUST A FEW DOZEN METRES AWAY”

Ivan and his parents were placed under arrest. As Elizabeth made herself comfortable on the throne and began her 20-year rule, the little boy and his family were sent into captivity at the fortress of Dünamünde in Riga. Little more than one year old, Ivan’s life was off to a bad start and, thanks to a combination of both gossiping courtiers and the new empress’s own paranoia, things were going to get a lot worse.

Offering their assurances that they would pose no threat to Elizabeth’s position, Antony Ulrich and Anna Leopoldovna asked the empress to release them and their son from captivity and allow them to establish a household in Brunswick. Satisfied that the family intended to fade into obscurity, the empress was on the verge of agreeing when disaster struck. Once again, political intrigues were about to intervene in the life of little Ivan in the very worst way.

The two nations of France and Austria were at loggerheads and both knew how important it could be to secure the support and understanding of Russia. The immensely influential Russian vice-chancellor Alexey Bestuzhev-Ryumin was known to favour Austrian interests and two French agents decided that this would never do. They hatched a plot to discredit Bestuzhev, and this would drag the innocent Ivan and his family into the centre of court intrigue.

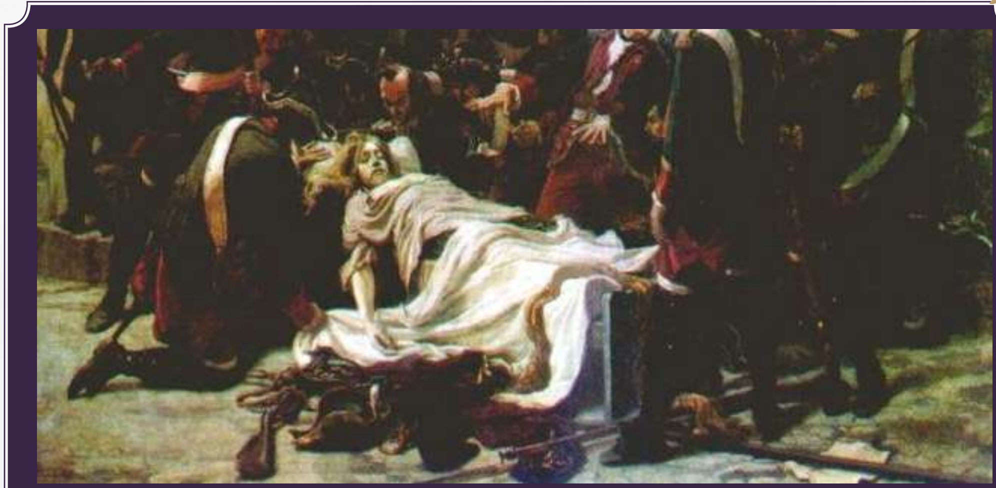
One of the most popular ladies at Anna’s court had been Natalia Fyodorovna Lopukhina, but she had fallen from favour once Empress Elizabeth came to power. Lopukhina was best friends with Anna Bestuzheva, the vice-chancellor’s sister-in-law, and both ladies were known to like a bit of gossip. The French agents started a rumour that Lopukhina and Anna Bestuzheva had been heard discussing the restoration of the child emperor with Lopukhina’s son. The conversation, which had never happened, might be innocent speculation but it might also be the start of something far more serious, with coups quite popular at the Romanov court.

Hearing of this possible threat to her authority, Empress Elizabeth had the two women taken into custody. Despite their protestations of innocence, their tongues were cut out and they too were exiled to Siberia. Perhaps their sentence might have been worse, but the empress had made a promise that no death sentences would be passed during her reign, and it was a promise that she kept. Vice-chancellor Bestuzhev somehow clung onto his influence and office against all the odds, but for Ivan things were not to end so well.

Just two months before Ivan celebrated his fourth birthday, Empress Elizabeth decided that he and his family would not be released after all – the risks to her power and position were just too great. Although the Lopukhina affair had provided no proof of any serious attempt to reinstate the deposed emperor, the damage had been done. Ivan had a legitimate claim to the throne, and Elizabeth became convinced that either his family or some other party might use him to depose her. It was a risk she wasn’t willing to take.

Ivan and his family were taken to Kholmogory on the White Sea and placed in the same prison, yet kept apart. As far as his parents knew, there

A silver ruble from Ivan VI's short reign. This coin is dated 1741



THE WOULD-BE RESCUER

After more than 20 years in captivity, one man made it his business to free Ivan VI, but who was Lieutenant Vasily Mirovich?

Mirovich was a Siberian-born soldier and the son of an exiled noble. He was raised with the unwavering belief that his family's fortune and privilege had been lost thanks to the machinations of the Romanov family. Ever since his grandfather had taken a stand against Peter the Great, Mirovich's family had lost what power and territory they ever had and the lieutenant was determined to win it back. When he learned of the identity of the prisoner in his care at Shlüsselburg, it was too good an opportunity to miss. He would free Ivan and, when the young man deposed Catherine the Great, the Mirovich family would once again enjoy the power and influence that had been snatched from them all those years ago.

Instead, the escape attempt failed and Ivan was killed. For his part in the plot, Lieutenant Mirovich became the first man to be executed by royal command in Russia in two decades.

son was nowhere near them and Ivan had no idea that his mother and father were being kept just a few dozen metres away, though they might as well have been on another continent. It was in this sad, desolate place that Ivan would spend what remained of his childhood.

The bright little boy who had reportedly been full of life and good cheer was confined to a cell and treated with little humanity. Ivan had no friends to play with and saw no other children, while he enjoyed precious little access to the world outside, let alone daylight. Ivan was allowed into the grounds only by night and under heavy guard, often while blindfolded. Unsurprisingly, the young boy's physical and mental health soon began to suffer. Empress Elizabeth was unmoved by his fate and her paranoia about his continued existence only grew worse. Eventually orders were given that, should any effort ever be made to break Ivan out of jail, then he should immediately be killed by his jailers.

Locked away so early in his physical and mental development, Ivan was given little to no education after he was taken from his parents. Although he did have some limited ability to read and write, he received no further schooling. Instead he was torn from all that was dear to him and thrust into an isolated, strict world in which even grown men and hardened criminals would struggle to cope. Still, Ivan's parents had always told him who he was and the youngster remained acutely aware of his birthright and what had been snatched from him.

No matter how many years were spent in captivity nor how confused his mental state became, he never forgot that he was once the emperor of Russia. As the years of captivity flew by and Ivan grew increasingly fragile, he still referred to himself by the title of emperor, but in that bleak and forgotten cell at Kholmogory, it was a word without meaning. Under constant armed guard, the boy who became known as the nameless one lived a life of lonely solitude from which he would never escape.

Despite the best efforts of the empress, Ivan and his mother remained in the public memory and rumours of his fate and location surfaced from time to time. For Elizabeth, even rumours were too much to stand and she did all she could to wipe away the memory of the captive family. Anna died in 1746, never having been reunited with her little boy, though Ivan's father lived until 1774. The child emperor was effectively written out of the country's history, but as is so often the case, this proved to be the worst approach possible. The rumours didn't fade, they just became louder and eventually Elizabeth took action against Ivan once more, intending to send him so far away he would be forgotten once and for all.

At the age of 16, Ivan was taken to Shlüsselburg, a forbidding fortress that would be his last home. In this new prison he was held in manacles, his lonely existence one of utter isolation. Even Elizabeth's death in 1762 brought no hope of freedom, and though the empress's successors met with Ivan, he remained in shackles, treated as a madman and denied his freedom. Of course, neither Peter III nor Catherine the Great were going to release the one person who could lay claim to their crown. Nor did they do anything to make his incarceration comfortable. Instead he was left to rot.

The emperor was labelled a lunatic and his name began to fade from the country's memory, yet one man had remembered the little boy who had been deposed. That man was Lieutenant Vasily Mirovich, a guard at Shlüsselburg who had ambitions of his own. In 1764, he cooked up a plan to mount a coup at the fortress and free Ivan. He intended to use the young man as the figurehead of a revolt that would depose Catherine the Great. Quietly he schemed, gathering support among the guards at the fortress until he decided that the time was right to make a move.

As Mirovich and his supporters stormed the prison, Ivan's jailers heard the commotion and put their long-held order into action. The life that began in a glittering palace was to end in a prison cell as they marched into their prisoner's room and attacked Ivan with their swords. The frail young man stood no chance against them and was killed almost instantly, destined never again to take his place on the throne of Russia.

It was the final act in a dark and tragic chapter in the history of Russia. One can only mourn for the fate of Ivan, the little boy who was a prisoner almost from the moment of his birth.

ELIZABETH I

AN EMPRESS AND HER EXTRAVAGANT COURT

Russia's third empress not only ruled an empire but also transformed the imperial court from barbaric Muscovite holdover to outwardly refined European splendour

Words **Greg King**

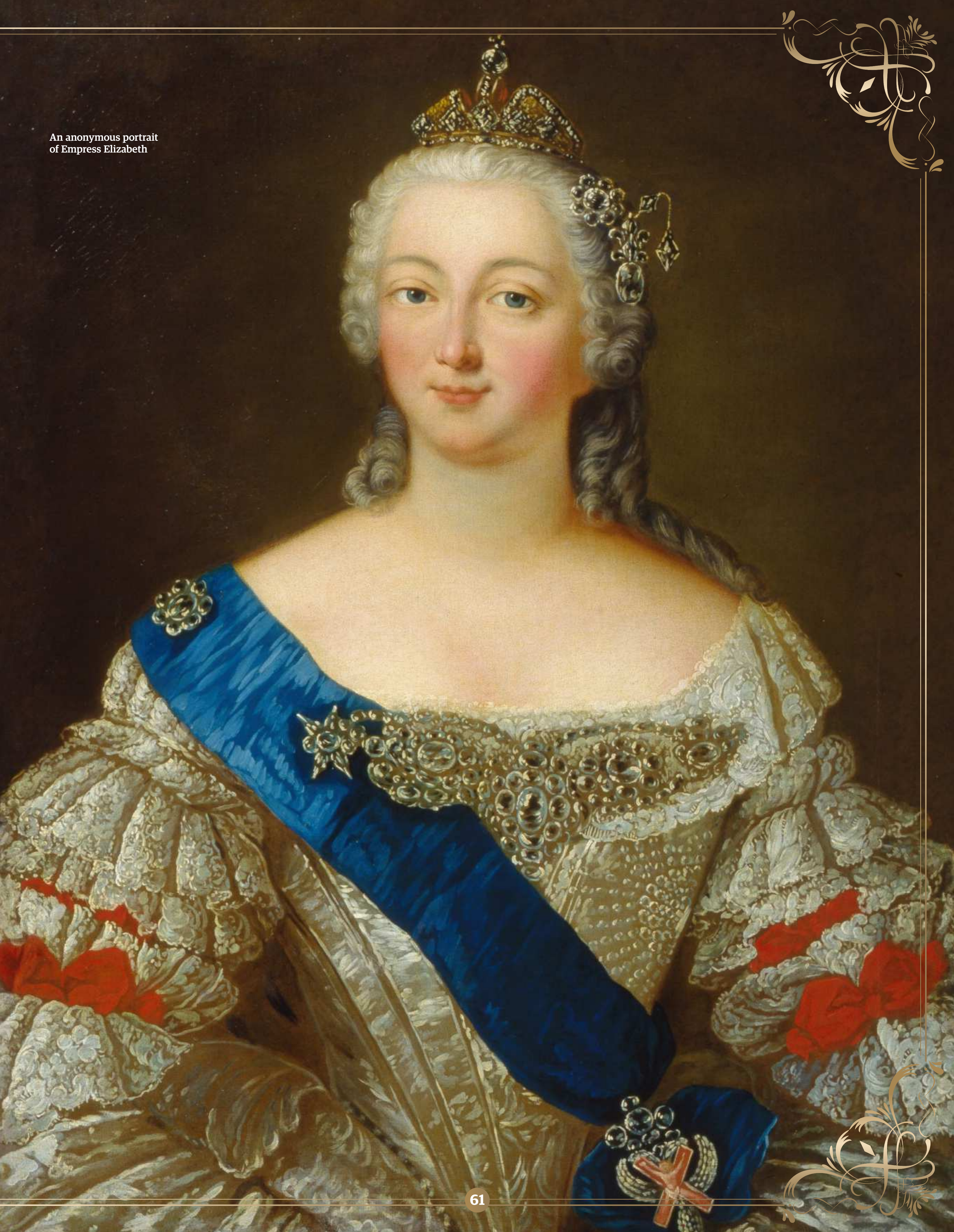
Empress Elizabeth, the third woman to rule Russia, was altogether different from her predecessors. Born in 1709, she was one of the two daughters from Peter the Great's second marriage who survived into adulthood. A French governess ensured that she not only spoke the Gallic tongue but also German, Italian and Russian. Elizabeth embodied the conflicting personalities of her parents. She shared her father's intelligence and unpredictable temper, along with a restless energy that burst forth in riding, hunting and dancing. She got her natural charm and sympathy from her mother.

By the age of 15, Elizabeth cut a fine figure at her father's court: fair, with large blue eyes, auburn hair and an elegant figure. Peter the Great wanted to marry her off to the future King Louis XV of France but the idea of a queen whose mother had been a common peasant was too much for the proud Bourbons. Before his death in 1725, Peter managed to secure her engagement to Prince Karl Augustus of the German house of Holstein-Gottorp. Mourning postponed the wedding until the spring of 1727, when death once again intruded. First Elizabeth's mother Catherine died, and two weeks later the prince went to an early grave before the marriage could be celebrated.

Elizabeth languished as first Peter II and then Empress Anna succeeded to a throne that she believed rightfully to be hers. Anna proved particularly jealous over Elizabeth's beauty, refusing to allow any marriage and forcing her into a quiet existence. Not to be outdone, Elizabeth took Alexei Shubin, a handsome young officer, as her lover: when Anna learned of the affair, she had Shubin arrested, his tongue cut out, and sent him to Siberia. Thereafter Elizabeth was more discreet: lovers appeared among the palace servants until she met Alexei Razumovsky, a handsome Cossack peasant whose master had brought him to St Petersburg from the Ukraine owing to his choral singing. Although other lovers came and went, the relationship with Razumovsky lasted the rest of Elizabeth's life. He never asked for favours, though she rewarded him with ranks and riches. It was even whispered they secretly married in 1742 and there were rumours of illegitimate children: no proof ever emerged, though several pretenders did, most notably Elizabeth Tarakanova, who was to cause Elizabeth endless headaches late in her reign.

Razumovsky was integral in the plot that placed Elizabeth on the throne. She carefully cultivated relationships with leaders of the Imperial Guard and gradually turned them against the infant Ivan VI and his regent mother Anna Leopoldovna. On the night of 25 November 1741, Elizabeth - clad in a soldier's uniform - arrived at the quarters of the elite Preobrazhensky Guard Regiment. "Whom do you want to serve?" she demanded. "Me, your natural sovereign, or those who have stolen my inheritance?" The soldiers backed Peter the Great's daughter. They stormed the Winter Palace, arrested the infant emperor and his parents, and proclaimed Elizabeth empress; it happened without warning and, even more remarkably, without bloodshed.

Elizabeth did much to restore faith in the throne. Her father's governmental departments were strengthened and she swept the hated Germans from positions of power. Russia continued its advance with economic reforms; in her reign the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts and the Imperial Porcelain Factory came into existence, and she encouraged Mikhail Lomonosov, the country's great scientist and literary genius, to found the empire's first institution of higher education, the University of Moscow. At the same time, though, the lives of serfs considerably worsened with increased taxes and decrees allowing their masters to punish, buy and sell them at will.



An anonymous portrait of Empress Elizabeth

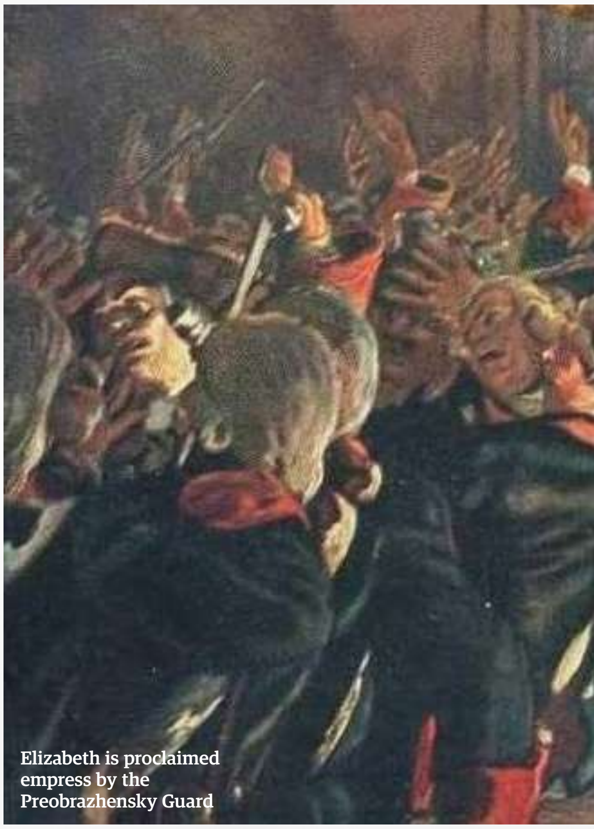
Russia managed a favourable end to its military conflict with Sweden only to become embroiled in the Seven Years' War. The country had little strategic interest in the question of soldiers being allowed to march across Germany, but Elizabeth let her hatred of Frederick the Great dictate foreign policy. Russian soldiers may have scratched their heads at the conflict, but they proved valiant and able. Victory was within sight and Prussia was on the verge of annihilation when the empress died. All her hard-won gains vanished when her successor, Peter III, came to the throne.

In a way the conflict summarised Elizabeth's reign. There were grand ideas, but she left most of the ruling to a series of talented advisers. With Elizabeth, it was a battle between ambition and frivolity, with the latter usually winning. The imperial court became one of the most extravagant and splendid in Europe, although it wasn't until Catherine the Great that the court took on more than a surface veneer of European manners and customs. Elizabeth made French the official court language and erected palaces meant to rival Versailles, but visitors still complained of rotting curtains and rats rampaging through the chambers.

Clothing became a preoccupation. Elizabeth was constantly on parade, and might change her clothing up to six times a day. She proudly boasted that she never wore the same dress twice; after her death, more than 15,000 gowns were catalogued among her belongings. She issued numerous decrees dictating the clothing her courtiers must wear. Ladies, for example, could never wear pink, which was Elizabeth's favourite colour. When one woman dared appear at a ball in a pink gown and with pink roses in her hair, the furious empress slapped her across the face - calling for a pair of scissors, she slashed at the gown, cut off her hair, then calmly returned to the dancing, leaving the poor lady collapsed in embarrassed tears.

Such displays underlined the empress's mercurial temper, but she was also vain, especially as she aged. She clad herself in increasingly expensive gowns of gold, rouged her cheeks, and piled cascades of diamonds in her powdered hair after the French fashion. Once maids were unable

"IT WAS A BATTLE BETWEEN AMBITION AND FRIVOLITY"


Elizabeth is proclaimed empress by the Preobrazhensky Guard

THE CATHERINE PALACE How Elizabeth build on her mother's legacy

The Catherine Palace at Tsarskoe Selo

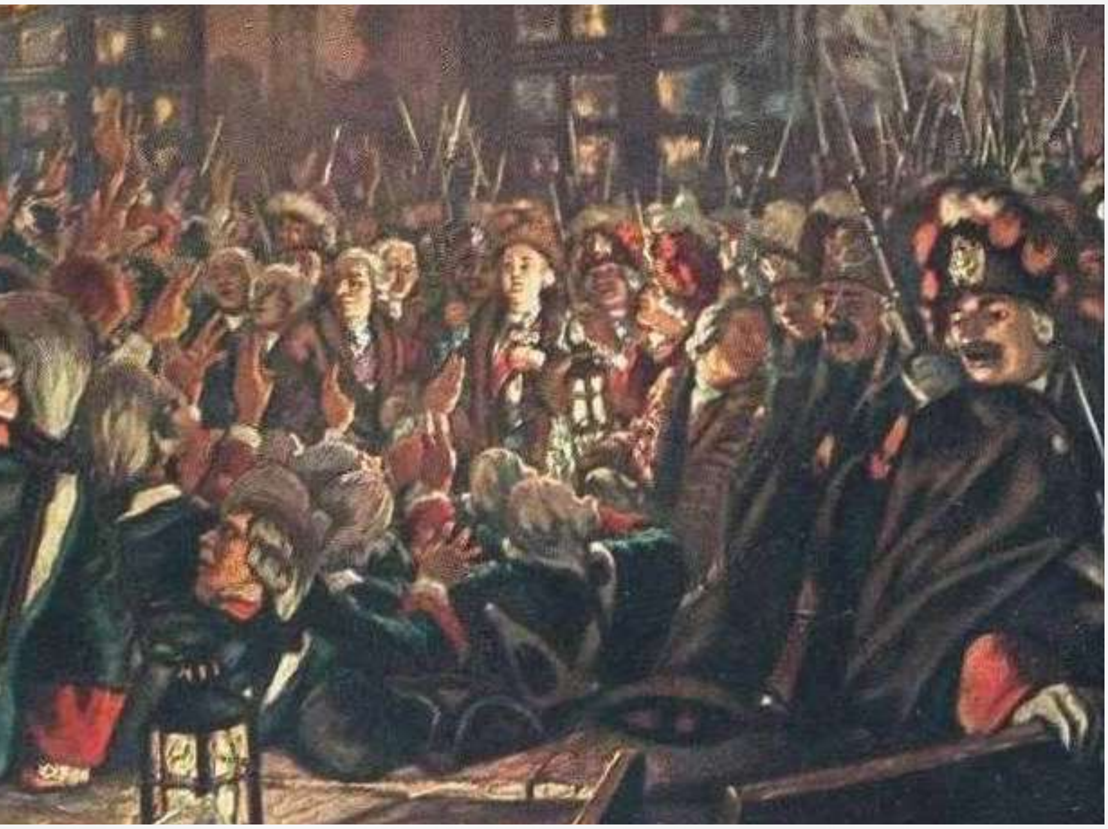
The Amber Room at Catherine Palace

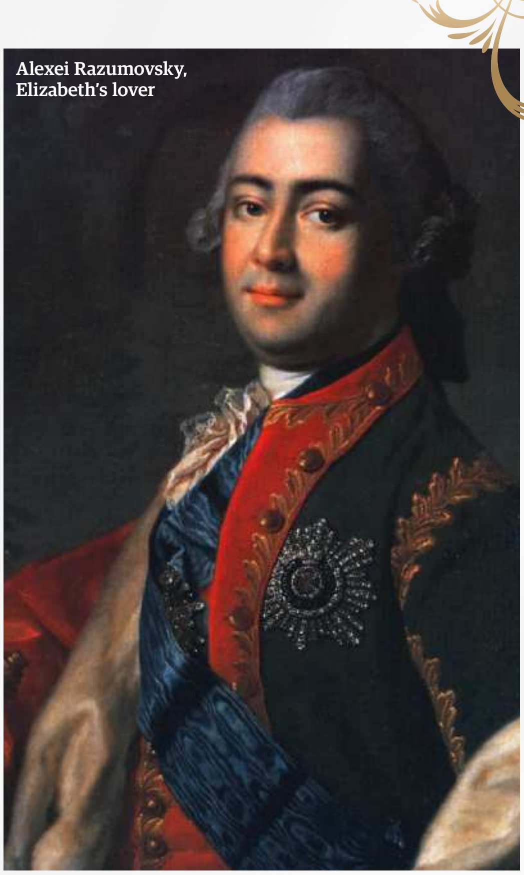
The reign of Empress Elizabeth saw the rise of a string of architectural masterpieces: there was her new Winter Palace in St Petersburg and the exquisite Grand Palace at Peterhof, stretching hundreds of metres above a fantastic cascade. But the greatest example of this age of Russian baroque was the palace Italian architect Bartolomeo Rastrelli erected for the empress at Tsarskoe Selo, just south of the capital.

Peter the Great had first given Tsarskoe Selo (Tsar's Village) to his wife Catherine as a rural retreat. Their daughter Elizabeth wanted something more impressive than her mother's little stone palace and in 1752 tasked Rastrelli with creating a more flamboyant palace worthy of her extravagant court. Four years passed before Elizabeth was able to view the finished building: the resulting structure was so stunning that even foreign ambassadors gaped in astonishment. Set in a park of elaborate parterre gardens, languid lakes and exotic follies, the new Catherine Palace stretched some 325 metres, its theatrical facade a riot of gilded columns, pilasters, and caryatids to contrast with the azure plaster on its walls.

Within, the Catherine Palace was full of carved and gilded woodwork, painted ceilings, and floors inlaid with more than a dozen rare woods in intricate geometric patterns. The Great Gallery, at the heart of the palace, exemplified the splendour of Elizabeth's court. Spanning the width of the palace, rising to two stories and stretching nearly 90 metres in length, the hall was lit by double rows of windows set between mirrors that were encased by gilded cherubs. On nights when Elizabeth held balls there, 56 chandeliers cast their glow over the room, creating a magical, glittering spectacle of reflected gold and shimmering jewels.

The most famous of all the halls, though, was the Amber Room. In 1716, King Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia gave Peter the Great 55 finely crafted panels of honey-coloured amber in return for some especially tall Russian soldiers. Elizabeth decided to use the panels, which had found a temporary home in the Winter Palace, in Rastrelli's new building at Tsarskoe Selo. In 1755, the panels were loaded into crates and transported to the Catherine Palace, where Rastrelli mounted them between gilded frames and mirrors to form a new and dazzling hall. In a palace whose beauty left visitors in silent awe, the Amber Room was the crowning jewel, a lustrous space that soon became famous across Europe as an example of Russian culture and extravagance.



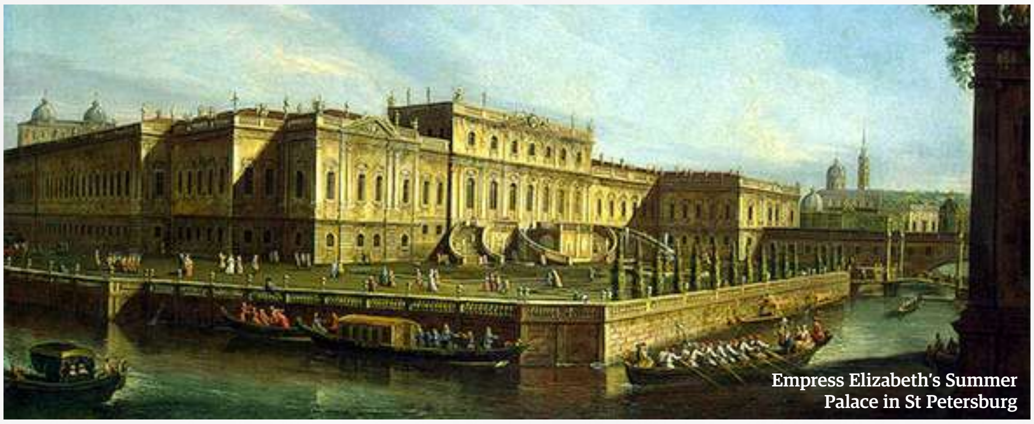


Alexei Razumovsky, Elizabeth's lover

to fully wash out the white powder and had to cut her hair short; in retaliation, Elizabeth ordered that all the ladies of the court must also have their hair lopped off, so as not to rival her in appearance.

In time court diversions came to dominate Elizabeth's life. She generally slept until midday, held government councils in the middle of the night, and danced and dined until 6am - a gruelling schedule she demanded her courtiers keep. There was some new diversion nearly every night: hunting fetes, opera fetes, naval fetes - any imaginable subject became the means to celebrate. Musicians imported from Europe entertained as hundreds of guests dined on paté, truffles and exotic pineapples shipped in from across the world. There were constant plays (Elizabeth favoured the works of the Comédie-Francaise) and operas (Italian) as well as endless ballet performances.

And then there were the imperial balls. Elizabeth loved dancing and often presided at several balls each week. Palace rooms were transformed into fragrant bowers with blossoming orange trees, banks of roses and even temporary fountains. The most famous of these events were the Metamorphoses balls, at which guests were asked to dress as the opposite sex. Most of the courtiers hated them: the gentlemen looked like fops in their gowns while the ladies felt constrained in uniforms and tailcoats. Only Elizabeth seemed to shine. "A masculine habit suited the Empress marvellously well," recalled the future Catherine the Great. "She had the finest legs I have ever seen (far finer than any man's) and a foot of admirable symmetry. She danced to perfection, and was just as graceful dressed as a man as she was as a woman."



Empress Elizabeth's Summer Palace in St Petersburg

Perhaps these court entertainments provided the empress with needed diversion from domestic matters. She was acutely aware of the need to find a successor. The situation was even more perilous with the deposed Ivan VI locked away but always a potential rival as long as he lived. Elizabeth wanted to restrict the throne to her father's direct descendants, but as she had no legitimate children, her thoughts turned to her late sister Anna's only son, the young Peter of Holstein-Gottorp. She brought him to Russia, had him baptised into the Orthodox Church, surrounded him with tutors, and named him as her heir. Peter loathed Russia, which he considered unbearably backward compared to his native Germany. Hoping to settle him down, the empress arranged his marriage in 1745 to another German import, Princess Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst. The union proved far from happy, and it was not until 1754 that Catherine, as Sophie had been renamed, gave birth to an heir: the future Paul I. But the empress destroyed any familial happiness by literally tearing the infant from his mother's arms as soon as he was born, and denying his parents any role in his upbringing. They were only allowed to see their son every few months, and only when Elizabeth was feeling charitable.

Paul's arrival coincided with a downturn in Elizabeth's health. Refusing to accept that she was ageing, she continued the frenetic pace of court entertainments until she was exhausted. Debilitating headaches and dizzy spells left her confined to her bed. On 24 December 1761, she collapsed, having suffered a severe stroke. She spent her last hours in prayer and bidding farewell to not only Peter and Catherine, but also Alexei Razumovsky. The next day Elizabeth died at the age of 52. She had brought stability to the empire, but within months Peter III would bring chaos to his adopted country.

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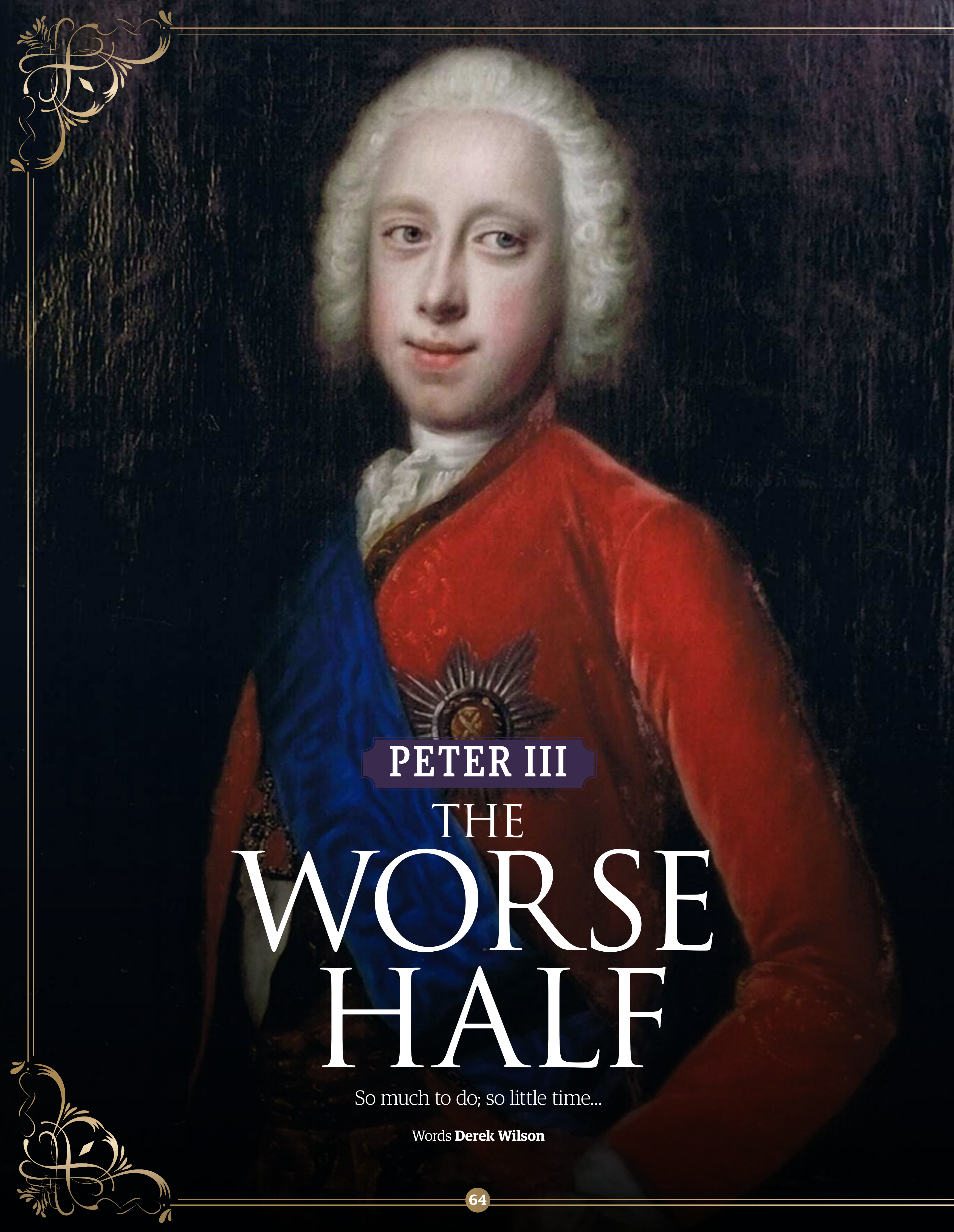


PETER III

THE WORSE HALF

So much to do; so little time...

Words **Derek Wilson**

The next of Peter the Great's male descendants to occupy the Russian imperial throne was Peter III. He occupied it for six months. But when you bear in mind the brevity of his reign, the fact that he was not Russian and could barely speak the language, and the opinion many people had of him as a good-for-nothing drunkard, it is remarkable that he achieved - or tried to achieve - so much.

Peter's mother was Anne, elder daughter of Peter the Great. She had been married to Charles Frederick, duke of Holstein-Gottorp and she died soon after Peter's birth. The boy's upbringing, therefore, was left completely in the hands of German relatives and tutors - until he reached his 14th birthday. His aunt, the Empress Elizabeth, decided to nominate him as her heir and brought him to St Petersburg. However by that time, the teenager was set in his ways. A marriage was arranged with his second cousin, Sophia Augusta of Anhalt-Zerbst, who converted to the Russian Orthodox faith, took the name Catherine and showed much more interest than her husband in her adopted country. Thanks to the complex inter-relatedness of German and Scandinavian princely families, Peter was also the designated heir-presumptive to the Swedish throne. However, the two nations were destined never to be united under a single ruler.

When he came to the throne at the beginning of 1762, Peter's political preoccupation was with affairs in Europe and strengthening the position of his German possessions. The Western nations were embroiled in the Seven Years' War (1756-63), a major conflict that pitched Britain, Portugal, Hanover, Prussia and other German states against an alliance of France, Austria, Spain, Sweden and Russia. Peter, a great admirer of Frederick the Great of Prussia, immediately decided to switch sides, even though this was not in Russia's best interests. The result of the tsar's action was to hasten the end of the war and drastically affect the European balance of power. France's supremacy suffered a great blow and Prussia emerged as a formidable, militaristic state. What can be said of Peter III's foreign policy was that it reinforced Russia's position as a major power in European affairs - though it was at a considerable cost in terms of casualties.

Peter had had several years to contemplate what he considered the backwardness of Russia's politico-economic framework. In his opinion the nation needed 'Germanifying' and despite reigning for such a brief time, he still managed to promulgate over 200 new laws. Many of these laws were totally impractical and could only serve to irritate significant elements in society. For example, he ordered Orthodox priests to dress like Lutheran pastors and tried to abolish church icons. Other reforms were more enlightened. Peter established religious freedom, for example, and abolished the secret police. More fundamental were the changes Peter instituted concerning the social structure of the empire. Since the time of Peter the Great, a 'middle class' of gentry landowners had emerged and been encouraged by succeeding rulers largely because they were a force the government could rely on to help curb the power of the boyars. One of the obligations of the gentry was military service. While this kept them loyal to the Crown, it also created problems regarding management of gentry estates. Peter III abolished this requirement completely and urged the landholders to care efficiently for their property and ensure that their sons were educated to a high standard. However the concept of freedom did not extend any further. The basis of society was serfdom. Although some standing evils were addressed, such as a master's right to kill his peasants, the millions of Russian serfs were still tied to the land and the landlords. Their emancipation had to wait another 99 years.

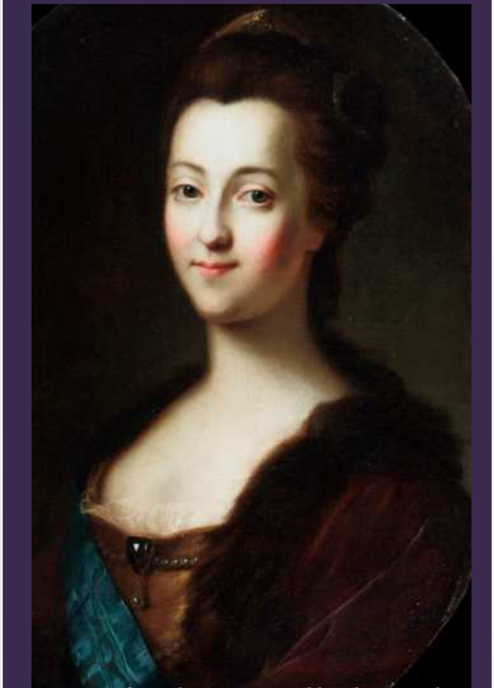
"HE ORDERED ORTHODOX PRIESTS TO DRESS LIKE LUTHERAN PASTORS"

It is difficult to square all this activity crammed into a reign of 186 days with the popular reputation of Peter as a cruel hedonist who held Russia and Russians in contempt and was mentally impaired. It is certainly true that his reputation has suffered by comparison with that of his wife. Not only was the marriage of Peter and Catharine loveless; she was more intelligent, more adaptable and more interested than her husband in the country he was set to rule over. The couple had two children during their 17-year marriage and Catherine would later claim that Peter was not their father. Husband and wife both felt free to take lovers.

It all started to come to an end for Peter in the summer of 1762, as disaffection with the emperor was rife. In particular he had alienated the guards regiments by his threat to subject them to harsher discipline (in line with that advocated by his hero, Frederick the Great). Catherine gave the malcontents her support on the condition that they would back her as Peter's successor. On 9 July there was a palace coup and the emperor was forced to abdicate. He was removed to Ropsha Palace, some 50 kilometres south of St Petersburg. There, within days, he died. No details of Peter's death have ever been discovered, but there is little reason to doubt that he was assassinated.

THE ULTIMATE SANCTION

Being emperor of all the Russias could be a risky business


Peter's wife, Catherine, usurped his throne and proved to be a much more capable ruler

©Getty

Of the 15 emperors and empresses who succeeded Peter the Great, five came to a violent end. We could say that the reason for this lay in the unstable power balances within the Russian political system. The ruler was vulnerable to rivals within his/her own family, any leaders, boyar factions and (by the 19th century) popular uprisings. This instability is not unique. We might instance the fate of emperors in the last centuries of the Roman Empire, for example.

Whatever irrational forces lie behind political assassination, there is always the need to explain or excuse imposing the ultimate penalty on a ruler. In the case of Peter III, we find his successor Catherine the Great offering varied motives over the years and revising them as situations changed. Initially she made her appeal to nationalism. Peter was a foreigner who posed a threat to "all true sons of the fatherland... and to our Greek orthodox dogma". She appealed to the army by calling Peter's changing sides in the Seven Years' War shameful. However, since she more or less followed Peter's foreign policy, she abandoned her denunciation of his military weakness and inconstancy by revealing that he had plotted a reckless war against Denmark. Towards the end of her life she defended her coup with the assertion that her husband simply lacked the qualities necessary to rule. It is as well that politicians feel the need to justify their actions. That does not mean we have to believe them.

CATHERINE II

SEX, LIES AND MILITARY MIGHT

How the unstoppable Russian ruler enthralled an empire

Words **Jessica Leggett**

She has gone down in history as 'Catherine the Great' thanks to her dedication and devotion to her adopted country. One of the Russia's greatest leaders, Catherine oversaw its unprecedented expansion, a series of military successes and the arrival of the Russian Enlightenment. Her reign is considered the Golden Age of Russia but her time on the throne was full of salacious scandal, intrigue and hidden truths that others used to tarnish her legacy. So, what really happened during her reign?

Catherine was born in 1729 as Princess Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst, an impoverished German royal. Her prospects were dim until Elizabeth, empress of Russia, wrote to Sophie's mother, proposing a match with her nephew and heir, Grand Duke Peter of Holstein. It was keenly accepted and Sophie was determined to seize her destiny, learning to speak Russian fluently, which greatly impressed Elizabeth. She seemed to be a perfect fit for the Russian throne.

In contrast, her betrothed was a terrible choice for an emperor. Born and raised in Germany, Peter was brought to Russia aged 14 and he hated it. He refused to convert to the Russian Orthodox Church - unlike Sophie, who converted and adopted a new name, Catherine, in 1744.

A year later, the couple married in St Petersburg. Recalling the wedding in her memoirs, Catherine stated that her "heart predicted but little happiness; ambition alone sustained me."

Catherine thought greatness awaited her. Instead, her husband turned out to be a drunk who played with toy soldiers like a child. They despised each other and their marriage went unconsummated for several years. But Catherine didn't want to waste her life and she told herself that she would become "the sovereign empress of Russia in [her] own right."

Feeling isolated and unloved, Catherine was getting desperate. After years of marriage, there was no heir, Elizabeth was breathing down her neck and the court was watching her every move. She started a series of affairs, firstly with Sergei Saltykov, a handsome rake and court member. Elizabeth actually encouraged their relationship, hoping it would result in a pregnancy.

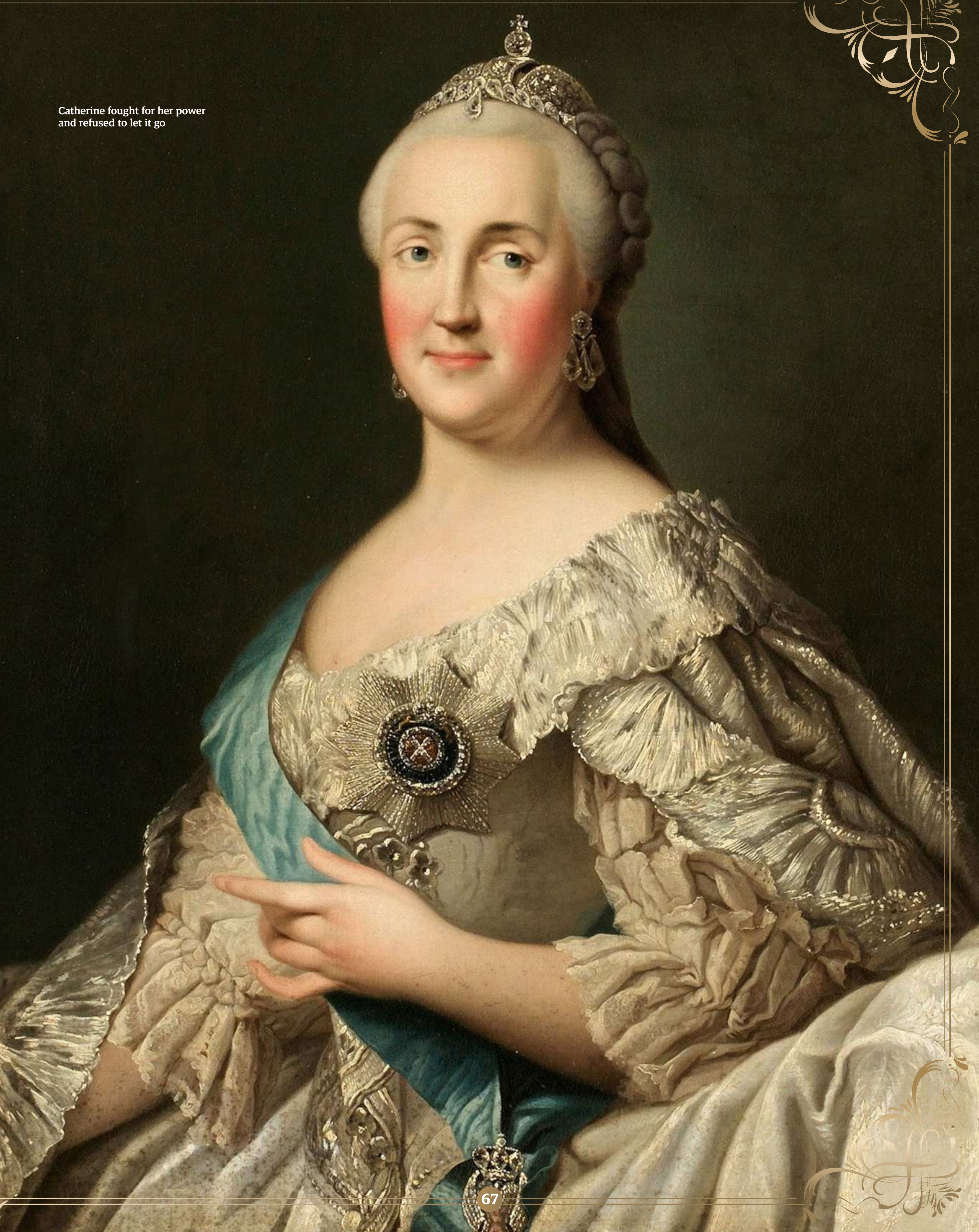
Catherine finally gave birth to a long-awaited heir, Paul, in 1754. The paternity is still debated today but Catherine implied in her memoirs that it was Saltykov, though possibly only to spite Peter. Regardless, she succeeded in her purpose and stabilised her position at court as the mother of the future emperor.

However, Catherine barely saw her baby as Elizabeth whisked him away and raised him herself. Catherine was devastated and her affair with Saltykov ended when he was sent away, too. Meanwhile, Peter's behaviour became foolish, worrying those around him. His wife, having fulfilled her duty, couldn't bear Russia crumbling in his insipid hands because he had failed to do his. She began to mastermind his downfall.

Elizabeth died in 1761 and Peter became Peter III. Catherine was now empress consort but it wasn't enough – she wanted sole power. Support for her grew after Peter's childish behaviour at Elizabeth's funeral, where he created a game to alleviate his boredom. Taking advantage of this, Catherine openly grieved for the deceased empress, winning many admirers in the process.

Peter's behaviour was inexcusable. He skipped his own coronation and withdrew from the Seven Years' War – despite the fact Russia was winning – returning all the land that they had conquered from Prussia. His actions disrespected those killed or injured during the conflict, alienating the army. Peter's contempt for the Church and his desire to wage war against Russia's long-time ally of Denmark exacerbated growing hatred towards him. He flaunted his mistress, Elizaveta Vorontsova, stating his desire to divorce Catherine and disinherit their son.

By April 1762, the situation was unbearable. Peter publicly humiliated Catherine at a state banquet by denouncing her as a fool, leaving



Catherine fought for her power
and refused to let it go

her in tears. Whispers circulated that night that the emperor, incensed and drunk, had ordered his wife's arrest. Fortunately, Prince Georg Ludwig of Holstein, Catherine's uncle, managed to dissuade him from committing such an act. It was the final straw and Catherine knew that she and her son were now in grave danger.

The empress knew that if her coup was to succeed, she needed someone with influence by her side. She started an affair with Grigory Orlov, a lieutenant of the Izmailovsky Guards who had caught her eye the year before. Catherine had chosen her new lover wisely. Alongside his brother and fellow guard, Alexei, he had the political influence that she needed to sway the imperial guardsmen to her faction. Aside from the political benefits, the couple also fell deeply in love and Orlov was determined to see his beloved on the Russian throne.

However, there was one obstacle that stopped Catherine from seizing power: she fell pregnant with Orlov's child. Previously, Catherine and Peter had been sleeping together infrequently and she could have claimed that he was the baby's father, however unlikely it may have seemed. But as communication between the two had practically stopped, there was no denying this secret liaison. Nobody could uncover the truth, lest it risk Catherine losing her valuable supporters. She managed to hide her pregnancy under voluminous dresses for months, fooling everyone around her. In April 1762, she secretly gave birth to a little boy, who ended up being raised far away from court.

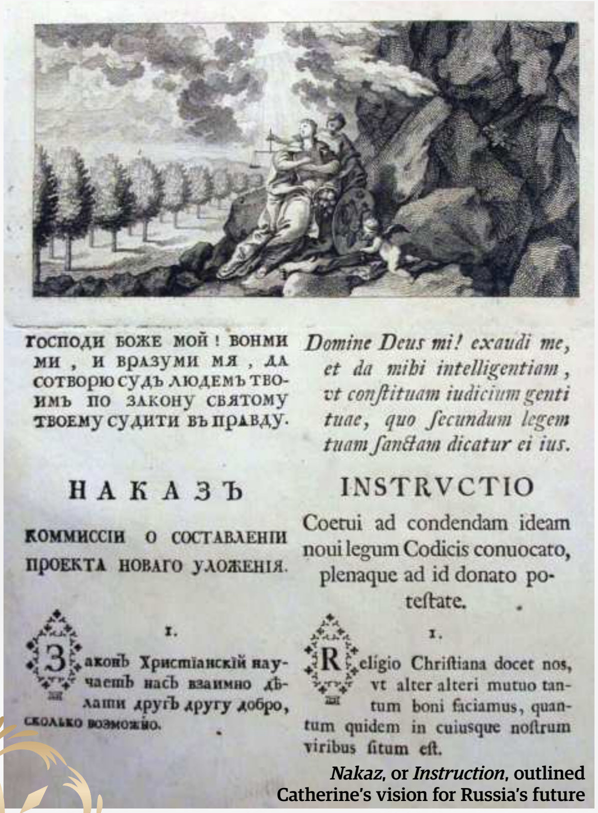
Peter soon left for Oranienbaum, in preparation for his fight against Denmark, while Catherine stayed at the nearby palace of Monplaisir. Her supporters prepared themselves and among them were the Orlov brothers, a number of guardsmen and Princess Dashkova, Elizaveta's sister. Even Nikita Panin, the politician entrusted as Paul's governor by Elizabeth, supported Catherine. With his control over her heir, Panin's backing was vital for the empress if she wanted the takeover to be seen as legitimate.

Peter ignored rumours of an impending coup but a conspirator was arrested on 27 June. Fearing that she would be exposed, Catherine, barely dressed, climbed into a waiting carriage and rode straight to St Petersburg in the early hours of 28 June. She headed to the barracks of her loyal guardsmen, visiting the Izmailovsky regiment first. The colonel of the regiment, Kirill Razumovsky, had loved Catherine for years. They pledged their allegiance to her and those who resisted were arrested. The usurper made her way to the Winter Palace to be sworn in as Russia's new ruler, to the exclamation of the crowd there.

As for Peter, the seriousness of the situation sank in as he arrived at Monplaisir to find it abandoned, with Catherine long gone. Despairing, he begged with his estranged wife, hoping to negotiate an escape to his native duchy of Holstein with Elizaveta. The answer was no. Peter fell into a drunken stupor, while Catherine readied herself outside the Winter Palace, wearing the uniform of a male guard. Climbing onto her horse, it was time to arrest her husband.

Word arrived of Peter's arrest and Catherine sent him a document of abdication, which he was forced to sign. Just over a week later, Peter was killed at Ropsha while in the custody of Alexei Orlov. Catherine waited a day before issuing a statement, claiming that Peter died of "a haemorrhoidal colic." But as Peter's body lay in state, it was bloody and bruised, the hallmarks of strangulation likely committed by Alexei himself. When Alexei wrote to Catherine to inform her of Peter's illness, he stated ominously, "I fear that he might die tonight, but I fear even more that he might live through it."

"THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION SANK IN AS HE ARRIVED AT MONPLAISIR TO FIND IT ABANDONED, WITH CATHERINE LONG GONE"



ГОСПОДИ БОЖЕ МОЙ! ВОНМИ МИ, И ВРАЗУМИ МЯ, ДА СОТВОРЮ СУДЪ ЛЮДЕМЪ ТВОИМЪ ПО ЗАКОНУ СВЯТОМУ ТВОЕМУ СУДИТИ ВЪ ПРАВДУ.

НАКАЗЪ

КОММИССІИ О СОСТАВЛЕНІИ ПРОЕКТА НОВАГО УЛОЖЕНІЯ.

1.

Законъ Христіанскій научаетъ насъ взаимно дѣлати другъ другу добро, сколько возможно.

Domine Deus mi! exaudi me, et da mihi intelligentiam, vt conſtituam iudicium genti tuae, quo ſecundum legem tuam ſanctam dicatur ei ius.

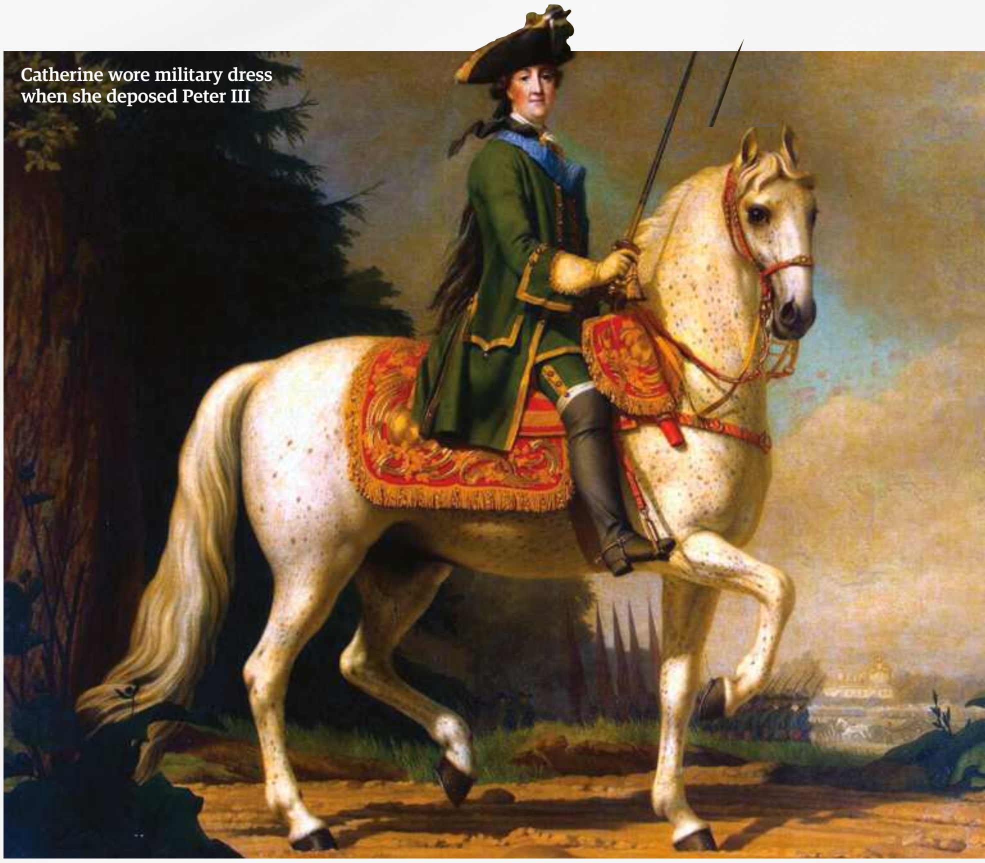
INSTRVCTIO

Coetui ad condendam ideam noui legum Codicis conuocato, plenaque ad id donato poteſtate.

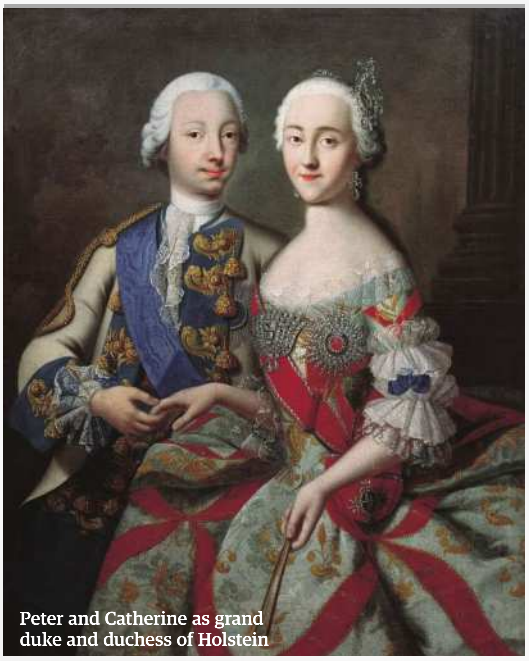
1.

Religio Chriſtiana docet nos, vt alter alteri mutuo tantum boni faciamus, quantum quidem in cuiusque noſtrum viribus ſitum eſt.

***Nakaz*, or *Instruction*, outlined Catherine's vision for Russia's future**



Catherine wore military dress when she deposed Peter III


Peter and Catherine as grand duke and duchess of Holstein

As suspicions arose that Catherine had committed regicide, she became nervous that her reign was already tainted. Was she involved in Peter's death? It couldn't be proven, but the fact that her position was now more secure is beyond certain. Catherine wanted sole, autocratic power, yet some of her co-conspirators, namely Panin and Dashkova, expected her to assume the regency on behalf of her young son. Catherine remained stubborn and was finally crowned in a sumptuous coronation in September 1762. Her message that she was in control came across loud and clear.

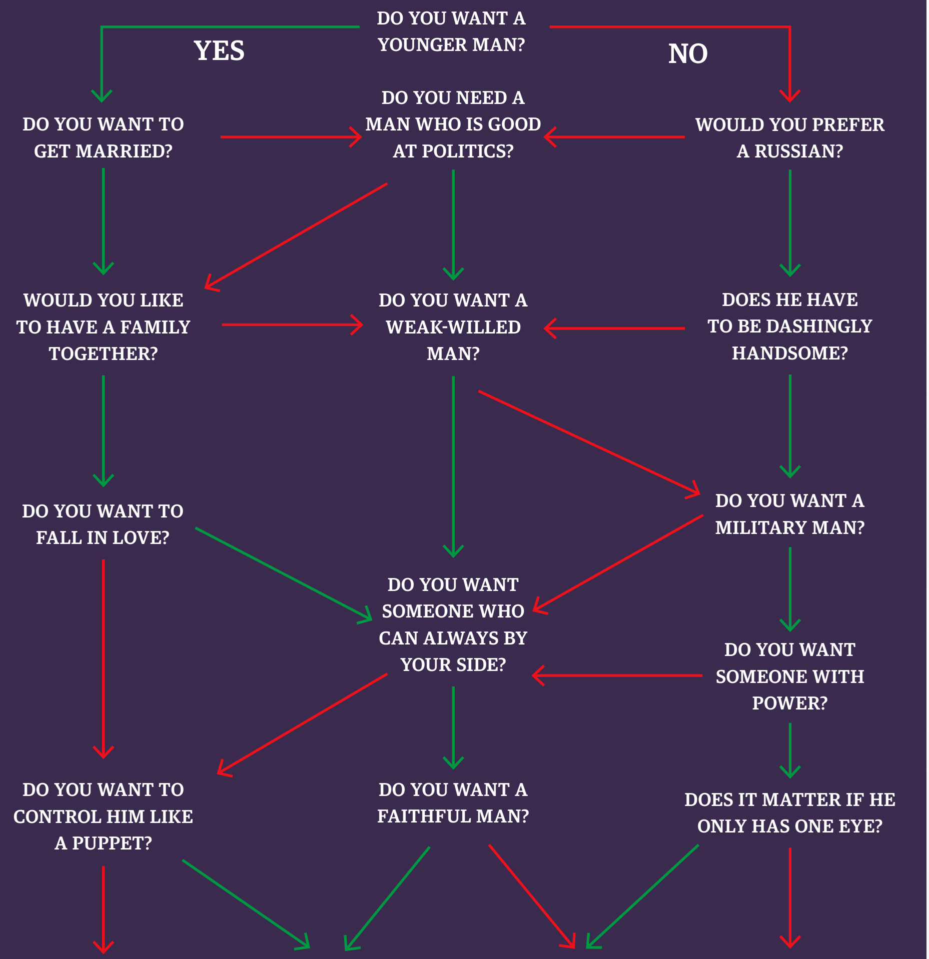
Catherine discovered the Enlightenment movement as a young girl and dreamed of modernising Russia. Conversing with some of the most famous French philosophers of the day, such as Voltaire and Diderot, Catherine had the opportunity to become the enlightened leader she craved to be. However, Russia was a complete mess. With a poor administrative system and a backwards economy, the country languished in the shadows of the other world powers. It needed a complete overhaul.

Catherine wanted to introduce a better education system, build new cities, develop Russian culture and possibly abolish serfdom. She wrote the *Nakaz*, also known as the *Great Instruction*, a momentous piece that took her two years to complete. It was inspired by the principles of Western philosophers and formed Catherine's idea of the perfect government. She presented it to the Legislative Commission, assembled in 1767, which consisted of approximately 500 people, all from different classes of society. On the surface, it advertised Enlightenment thinking as a way to revitalise Russia, but in reality it reinforced Catherine's belief in absolutist monarchy.

The Commission failed to achieve anything before it was disbanded in 1768. It embodied the hypocrisy that Catherine would peddle throughout her reign – she wanted to be perceived

DATE FOR AN EMPRESS

Who is the perfect lover for Catherine the Great?


DO YOU WANT A YOUNGER MAN?

YES

NO

DO YOU WANT TO GET MARRIED?

DO YOU NEED A MAN WHO IS GOOD AT POLITICS?

WOULD YOU PREFER A RUSSIAN?

WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE A FAMILY TOGETHER?

DO YOU WANT A WEAK-WILLED MAN?

DOES HE HAVE TO BE DASHINGLY HANDSOME?

DO YOU WANT TO FALL IN LOVE?

DO YOU WANT A MILITARY MAN?

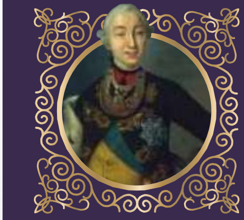
DO YOU WANT SOMEONE WHO CAN ALWAYS BY YOUR SIDE?

DO YOU WANT SOMEONE WITH POWER?

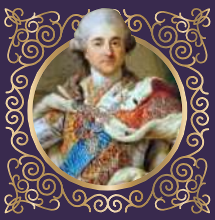
DO YOU WANT TO CONTROL HIM LIKE A PUPPET?

DO YOU WANT A FAITHFUL MAN?

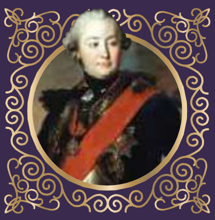
DOES IT MATTER IF HE ONLY HAS ONE EYE?


PETER III OF RUSSIA

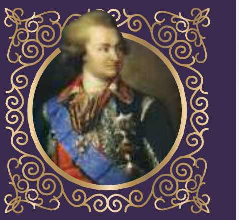
Catherine's cold and childish husband hated his adopted country of Russia, managing to upset the army, the Church and the nobility just months into his reign. Catherine and Peter despised each other and he threatened to divorce his wife and replace her with his mistress. Catherine deposed her husband in 1762 and he died under suspicious circumstances.


STANISLAW PONIATOWSKI

Catherine fell in love with Poniatowski while she was still a grand duchess and together they had an illegitimate daughter, Anna. Poniatowski was forced to leave the Russian court during the Seven Years' War and his affair with Catherine ended. They kept in contact and with Catherine's support, Poniatowski was elected king of Poland, although she used him as puppet.

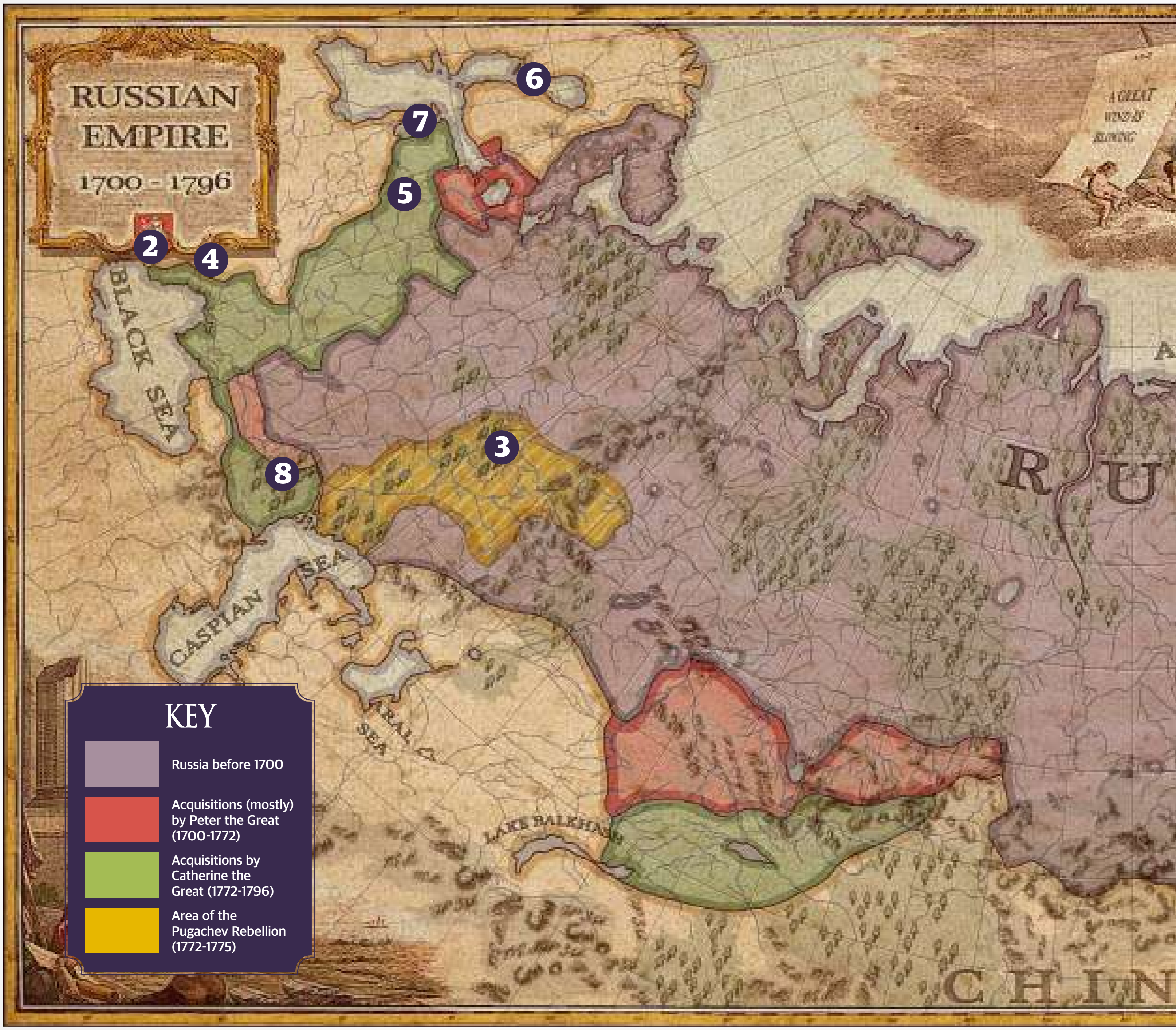

COUNT GRIGORY ORLOV

Orlov was Catherine's foremost supporter in her plot to overthrow her husband and played an instrumental role in the coup in 1762. He remained Catherine's favourite for over a decade and together they had an illegitimate son, Alexey. Orlov's downfall was guaranteed once she discovered his affairs with other women and she banished him from the court.


PRINCE GRIGORY POTEMKIN

Catherine and Potemkin had a passionate, if short-lived, love affair. Just like Orlov, Potemkin supported Catherine during the coup and eventually succeeded him as her favourite. After their physical relationship ended, Potemkin remained by Catherine's side and was the most powerful man in her court for two decades before his early death at the age of 52.

EXPANSION OF AN EMPIRE


RUSSIAN EMPIRE
1700 - 1796
6
7
5
2
4
3
8
A GREAT WIND IS BLOWING
BLACK SEA
CASPIAN SEA
ARAL SEA
LAKE BALKHASH
RU
CHIN
KEY
Russia before 1700
Acquisitions (mostly) by Peter the Great (1700-1772)
Acquisitions by Catherine the Great (1772-1796)
Area of the Pugachev Rebellion (1772-1775)

01 ALASKA COLONISATION, 1766

Catherine wrote to the governor of Siberia, declaring the indigenous people of the Aleutian Islands and the Alaska Peninsula to be Russian subjects. She instructed the Russian fur-traders to treat their new fellow subjects well. After this, tax collectors accompanied Russian fur-hunters on their voyages to Alaska and the government licensed fur-hunting expeditions.

02 FIRST RUSSO-TURKISH WAR, 1768-74

The first in a series of wars between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was sparked by a conflict over borders. Catherine's victory led to Russia expanding its influence in Europe and gaining territory in modern-day Ukraine. The Turks were forced to accept the Crimean Khanate's independence, providing an opportunity for Catherine to annex it later on.

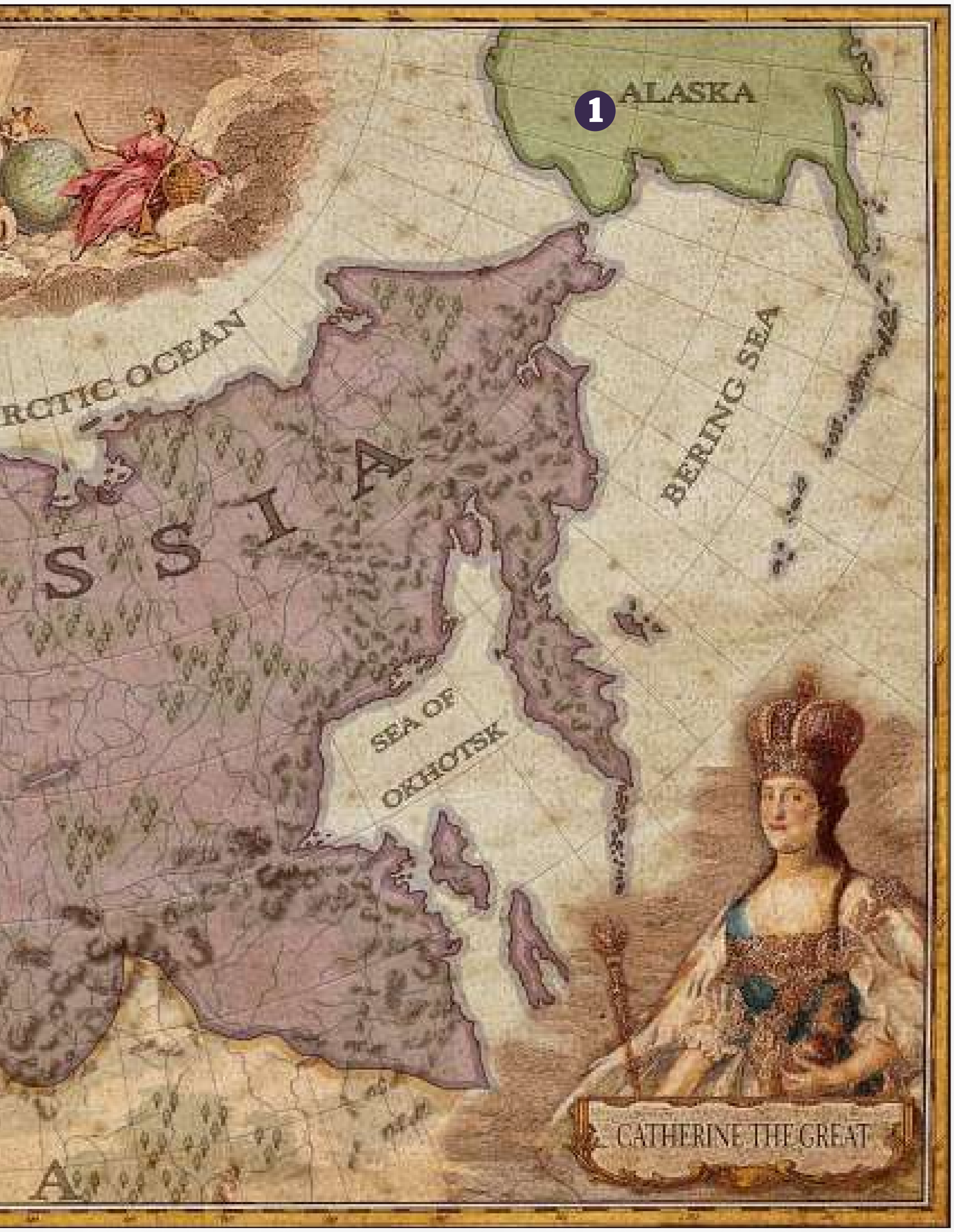
03 PUGACHEV'S REBELLION, 1773-75

After Catherine usurped the throne, she faced a number of rebellions from pretenders, with the most serious revolt led by a Cossack, Yemelyan Pugachev. He claimed to be the deceased Peter III and his rebellion gathered pace as the government failed to see it as a legitimate threat. Catherine eventually had it brutally suppressed, leaving thousands of rebels dead.

04 SECOND RUSSO-TURKISH WAR, 1787-92

Still reeling from their defeat 13 years earlier, the Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia once again. They attempted to regain the territory that they had previously lost to Russia but instead suffered a decisive defeat. Following the Treaty of Jassy in 1792, the Turks were forced to accept Russia's annexation of Crimea that had occurred in 1783.

How Catherine extended Russian territory



around the world as an enlightened leader but the truth was a very different story. The obvious example is the issue of serfdom. At one time, Catherine may have considered reforming or abolishing serfdom in the Russian Empire altogether, but the economy depended too heavily on the workforce, who belonged to the aristocracy, and Catherine ultimately relied on the nobles for support. Consequently, apart from slightly improving the rights of serfs, Catherine actually did nothing to improve their situation throughout her reign.

Nevertheless, she did accomplish some of her goals. She was committed to improving education in Russia to bring it in line with the West and alongside new towns and cities, she founded academies, libraries and schools across her vast empire. For the first time, free schooling became available for all children - except serfs - and the curriculum became standardised. Furthermore, Catherine championed education for women and even established the Smolny Institute for young noble girls, the first of its kind, in St Petersburg in 1764.

As a fierce patron of the arts, her personal collection of artwork was the largest in Europe at the time. Having amassed thousands of masterpieces, she founded the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg in 1764 and it is still a museum of art and culture today, open to the public since 1852. She also imported Western literature and encouraged the arrival of foreign artists and architects to improve Russia culturally. A woman on a mission, the empress even sent Russian academics abroad to learn the ways of Western culture and society and disseminate them back in the motherland.

As for foreign affairs, Catherine took massive strides in comparison to her predecessors. She patronised her former lovers with titles, money and power throughout her reign. However, there was one that she went the extra mile for - Stanisław Poniatowski. They had had an affair back in 1755, when he was the Polish secretary to the British envoy in Russia, but it had ended after Poniatowski was forced to leave during the Seven Years' War, which pitched Russia against British-backed Prussia. He had hoped to reignite

05 Polish-Russian War, 1792

War broke out in Poland between the anti-Russian, pro-reform Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the anti-reform Targowica Confederation. The latter was supported by Catherine, who was angered by a new alliance between the Commonwealth and Prussia made in an attempt to stop Russian interference in Poland. Poniatowski believed that Russia would eventually win and sought a ceasefire, to the anger of his countrymen.

06 Russo-Swedish War, 1788-90

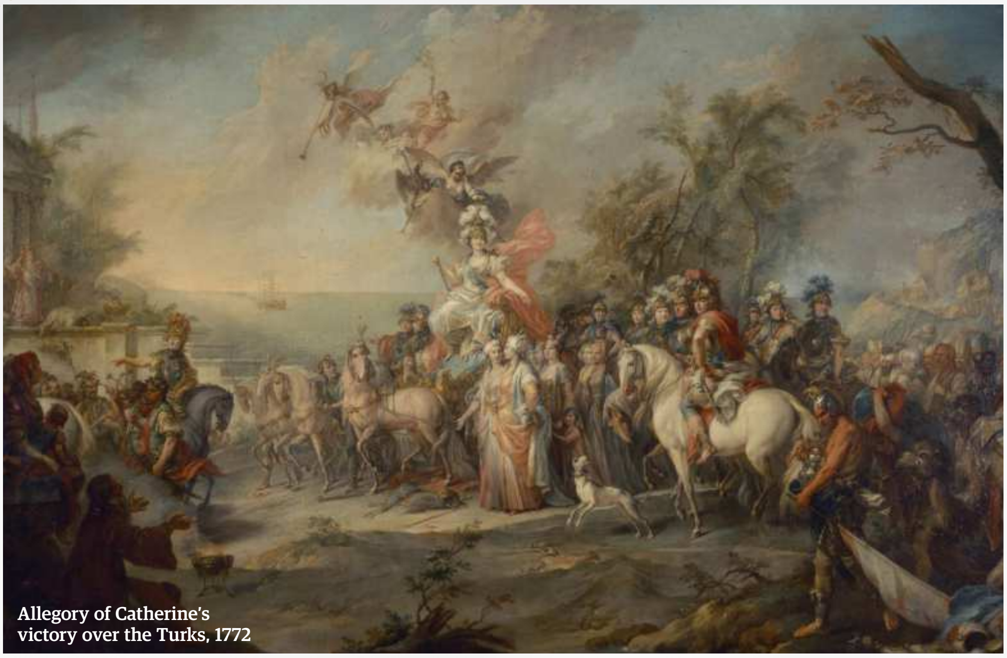
The Ottoman Empire formed an alliance with Gustav III of Sweden against Catherine, his cousin. Gustav wanted to depose her, hoping that it would bolster his popularity in Sweden, but despite some success, the war racked up some serious debt. As for Catherine, she gained nothing from the conflict and wanted to reach peace deal, which was concluded in 1790.

07 Kościuszko Uprising, March 1794

Following the first and second partitions of Poland, there was a popular uprising against Russian control over the country. Following Russian demands that the Polish downsize their army, the supreme commander, Tadeusz Kościuszko, led a rebellion. He was captured seven months later and the revolt was repressed, leading to the third and final partition of Poland in 1795.

08 Russo-Persian War, 1796

The last war of Catherine's lifetime, Russia went to war against Persia after the latter invaded Georgia, a country that Russia had sworn to protect, in 1795. Russia hoped to depose the shah, Agha Mohammad Khan, who hated Russia, and replace him with someone who liked the country. Catherine's armies were winning but following her death, her successor, Paul, withdrew the Russian troops.



Allegory of Catherine's victory over the Turks, 1772

their romance, but Catherine knew this was too dangerous and told him, "You are likely to get us both slaughtered."

Instead, when the Polish throne became vacant in 1763, Catherine promised it to Poniatowski. It was the perfect chance to expand her empire and he was elected under the threat of the Russian military in 1764. Straight away, Poniatowski attempted to pass a series of reforms that weren't part of Catherine's plan. She needed Poland to remain a weak protectorate and her former lover was supposed to be her puppet, not a lone wolf. When rebellion broke out in Poland in 1768, partly in reaction to Russian influence in the country, Catherine invaded under the pretence of restoring control.

Her dominance over Poland concerned Prussia, Austria and, in particular, the Ottoman Empire, which suffered a series of defeats at her hands during the ongoing Russo-Turkish War that had also broken out in 1768. These losses shifted the European balance of power in Russia's favour, no doubt to Catherine's delight. However, the arrival of bubonic plague in Moscow between 1770 and 1772 and the resulting riots pushed Catherine into seeking a truce as a reprieve.

To rebalance the power in Europe, Russia, Austria and Prussia all agreed as neighbours of Poland to partition the country among themselves, without discussing it with the Polish king. As a result, Catherine gained around 92,000 square-kilometres of territory for her empire – almost the size of modern-day Portugal. It was the first of three partitions of Poland, which led to Poniatowski's downfall in 1795, just a year before Catherine's death. He spent his final years in Russia, surviving on a pension that was provided by the empress.

Following Catherine's victory over the Turks in the Russo-Turkish War in 1774, tensions were high with the Ottoman Empire. With the territory she gained, she established a province to the south of Russia, known as New Russia (now part of modern-day Ukraine). When she annexed Crimea in 1783, a former Turkish territory, a second conflict broke out. The second conflict, fought from 1787 to 1792, saw the Turks heavily defeated again and Catherine's authority over Crimea was secured. It was one of the greatest military achievements of her reign.

During the trouble with Poland and the first Turkish war, Orlov continued to dominate the court as Catherine's lover. During the decade since the coup, Orlov was rewarded with lands and titles and is credited for dealing with the Moscow plague riots. Catherine considered marrying him, until she realised that such a move was far too controversial. Despite concern about Orlov's power, he held no sway over Catherine or her governance of Russia. She knew that he was too politically inept to deal with such matters, choosing to consult Panin instead.

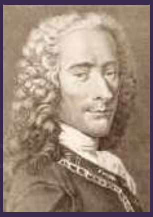
Orlov's relationship with Catherine sparked intrigue and jealousy from others, especially Panin, and by 1771, he was plotting his rival's downfall. His scheming paid off as Catherine was made aware of Orlov's various infidelities. Angered and heartbroken, she sent Orlov away from court, never to regain her favour again.

During her relationship with Orlov, Catherine became close to Grigory Potemkin. Their love story is infamous but not straightforward. They met on the night of the coup and Catherine rewarded him for his loyalty by promoting him to gentleman of the bedchamber, a position that allowed them to meet frequently. Potemkin had loved Catherine ever since and unlike the other men at court, he wasn't afraid of Orlov.

Potemkin was bold, openly declaring his love for Catherine at every opportunity. She enjoyed

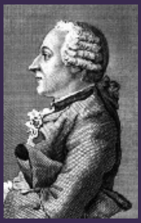
ENLIGHTENMENT PEN PALS

Catherine corresponded with many of the great minds of her day



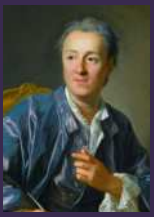
Voltaire

Catherine and the French philosopher Voltaire never met but wrote to each other for years. While Voltaire is famous for savaging the French monarchy for its extravagance, he approved of Catherine's role as an 'enlightened despot', nicknaming her the 'Star of the North'. Some have interpreted Catherine's side of the correspondence as a public relations exercise, casting her in a more positive light in Europe, but she had been an enthusiastic reader of Voltaire since she was a princess, so no doubt she was flattered to chat with one of her adolescent idols.



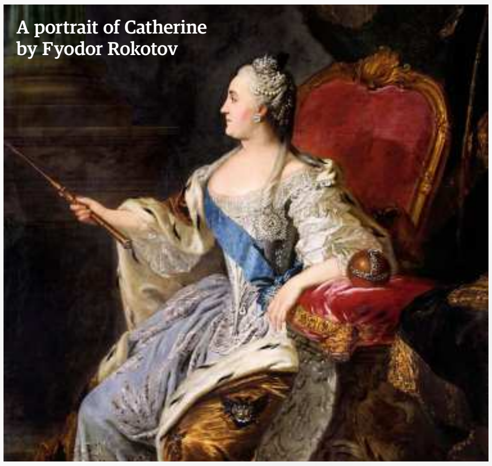
Baron von Grimm

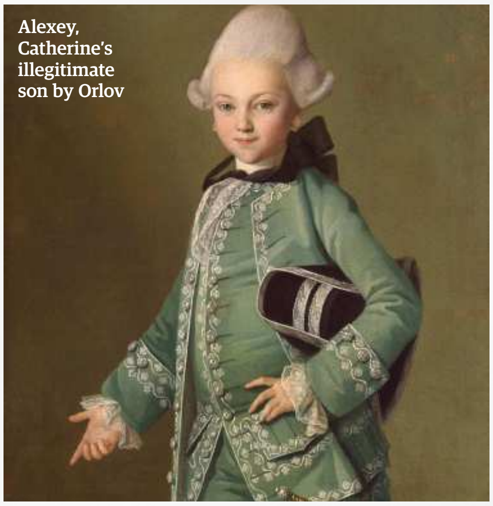
Friederich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, hung out in Paris' progressive literary circle thanks to his acquaintance with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He wrote a cultural newsletter for foreign sovereigns and nobility that were keen to keep up with 18th-century French fashions. However, Catherine and Grimm also kept up a personal correspondence for 26 years. Grimm fed her tidbits about what was going on in European courts while she patronised some of Grimm's preferred architects. Despite both being of German descent, the pair always wrote to one another in fluent French.

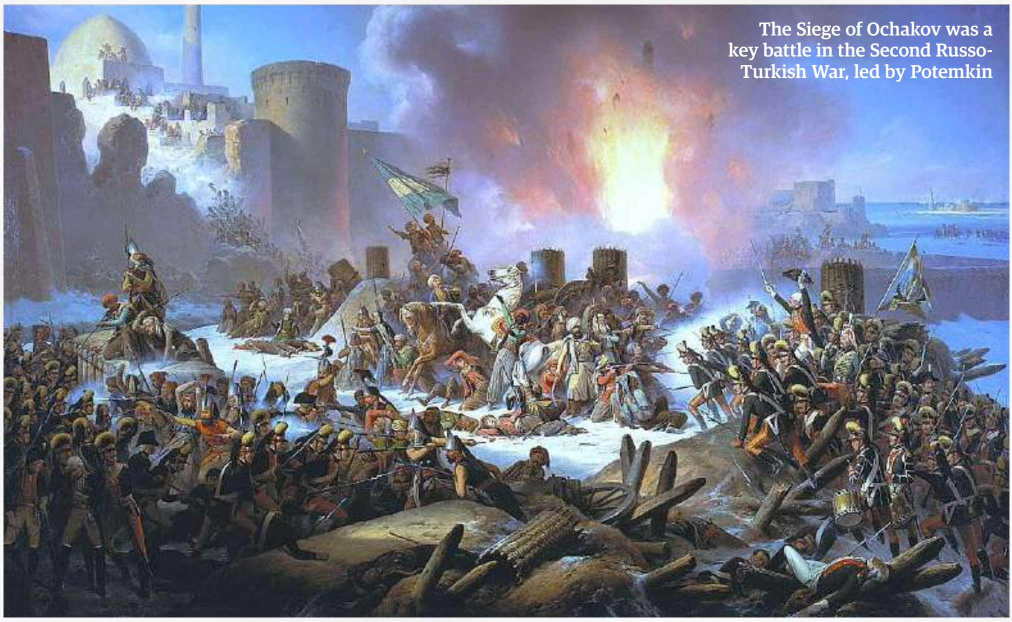


Denis Diderot

Another French thinker, Diderot, is best known for co-founding and heavily contributing to the *Encyclopédie*, the definitive work of Enlightenment thought. When the empress heard that he was in need of money, she offered to buy his library. She also appointed him caretaker of it until he died and paid him a 25-year salary in advance. Diderot felt obliged thank her in person in 1773, but the trip was mired when he tried to lecture her on the best way to govern Russia. Though Catherine dressed him down for this, she continued to patronise Diderot until his death in 1784.


A portrait of Catherine by Fyodor Rokotov


Alexey, Catherine's illegitimate son by Orlov


The Siege of Ochakov was a key battle in the Second Russo-Turkish War, led by Potemkin

his attention but was too hesitant to pursue anything, perhaps because of Orlov. However, she didn't discourage Potemkin and, seeing his potential, Catherine began to forge him a career in politics - the start of his dramatic rise within the court.

After suffering a severe eye injury, Potemkin suddenly left the court. Catherine missed him terribly and after 18 months, she demanded his return in 1767. She appointed him as an army paymaster before promoting him as the Guardian of Exotic Peoples for her Legislative Commission, a politically important role. When the First Russo-Turkish War broke out, Potemkin was desperate to go to the front and Catherine allowed it, though she longed for his return.

After Orlov's dismissal, Catherine distracted herself with a new, younger lover, Alexander Vasilchikov, much to Potemkin's disappointment when he briefly returned in 1772. However, Catherine's interest in Vasilchikov faded quickly, although she compensated him with a sizeable pension and lands. Instead, her thoughts turned back to Potemkin, now a war hero thanks to his military success abroad.

When Potemkin disappeared from court again at the start of 1774, Catherine finally accepted their love. He returned and their affair started, with Catherine in her mid-40s and Potemkin a decade younger. With his military experience, he was a useful advisor and the first of her lovers with whom Catherine chose to share her power. She bestowed upon him a number of military and political promotions, including governor-general of New Russia, which granted him absolute power over the region.

The couple's numerous love letters to one another indicate that they secretly married. In a letter to Potemkin, Catherine refers to him as "my dear, sweet angel, my very own friend, my husband," and in another tells him that she'll "remain [his] true wife to the grave." Whether they actually married is uncertain, but considering the nature of the letters and Potemkin's influence at court, it is a possibility.

Unfortunately, their great love affair didn't last. Catherine and Potemkin were both passionate but, plagued with jealousies and insecurities, their relationship mutually cooled. By 1775, Catherine had a new favourite but unlike her previous lovers, Potemkin retained his position of personal and political influence over her for the rest of his life. In fact, he held so much control that rumours swirled that he procured new lovers for Catherine.

Scandalous gossip also spread that the empress's lovers were vetted for their bedroom skills by one of her ladies-in-waiting before she slept with them. This was likely baseless slander but Catherine's love for men was well known. Her sexuality became the focus of lewd jokes and crude satires designed to criticise her in Russia and further afield in Europe. Potemkin's influence over her was also subject to such attacks, causing cracks in her image as an absolute ruler. Her vice was exposed - but Catherine was no less powerful as a result and neither was she ashamed.

While Potemkin was abroad as commander-in-chief during the Second Russo-Turkish War, Catherine caught sight of a vain young officer, Platon Zubov. At 22 years old, he was almost four decades younger than the empress, who at that point had turned 60. Their affair began in 1789 and Catherine loved him deeply. She relied on him, perhaps because of her advanced age, and Zubov rose far quicker than any of her previous lovers. However, the toy boy nature of this relationship once again opened the aging empress up to sexual ridicule.

Catherine's happiness was hampered by the arrival of tragic news in October 1791. Potemkin had passed away abroad while negotiating peace treaty with the Turks after days of suffering with fever and symptoms of pneumonia. Catherine was grief-stricken. For the past two decades, he had been her pillar of strength and now she had to manage without him.

For the last five years of her life, the empress lavished her attention on Zubov. He played a crucial role in making decisions during her reign, leaving him envied and despised and the court couldn't understand Catherine's infatuation with him. Zubov even managed to convince the empress to give his brother command over her army in the Russo-Persian conflict, which began in April 1796, instead of a seasoned general. Although it turned out to be a good decision, with the younger Zubov returning in victorious glory, there is no denying that this was a different ruler to the one who had usurped the throne three decades earlier.

But Catherine never saw the outcome as she passed away in November 1796. Perverse stories of her unbridled sexuality surfaced, aimed at destroying her legacy and reputation. The most famous one claimed that she had died after engaging in bestiality with a stallion, which crushed her when its supporting harness snapped. The reality is actually far less vulgar - Catherine collapsed following a stroke, never to regain consciousness.

It was an uneventful end for an unabashedly colourful woman, who will always be remembered through her epitaph as Catherine the Great.

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PAUL I

TAKING OUT THE TSAR

The reign of Paul I was among the darkest chapters in tsarist history; suspicion and paranoia eventually led to his assassination

Words **Greg King**

Tyranny followed enlightenment when Paul I succeeded his mother Catherine the Great. Despotism cloaked insecurities. Catherine later hinted that his real father had been officer Sergei Saltykov, which wrapped Paul in a mantle of uncertainty. Whisking him away from Catherine at the moment of his birth in 1754, Empress Elizabeth destroyed any maternal bonds, and Paul grew up isolated and often abandoned. Paul held Catherine responsible for the assassination of his father, and resented her for having taken the throne.

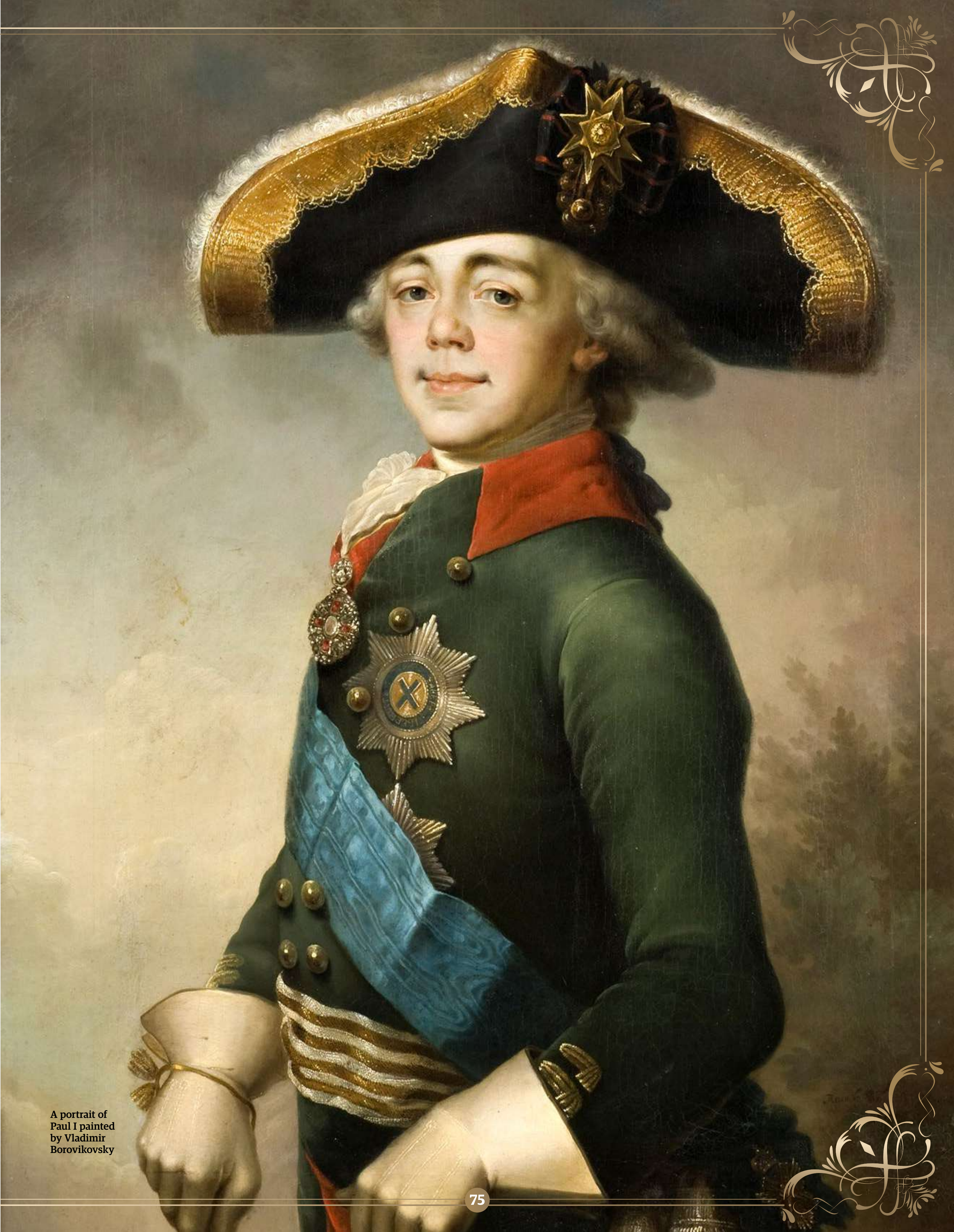
Childhood days passed with tutors and priests who filled Paul's head with whispered gossip against his mother. He grew to despise her intellectualism and her circle of favourites, while he was denied such confidences. Impetuous and mercurial, he began criticising the empress, which only widened the gulf between them. His first marriage, to a German princess, ended prematurely when she died in childbirth in 1776. Catherine waited just six months before she arranged another marriage to another German princess, Sophia Dorothea of Württemberg, who took the name Maria Feodorovna and gave him ten children.

Paul was so sensitive about his small stature that when he walked he never bent his legs but instead goose-stepped. Saddled with a swarthy complexion, a snub nose and "extraordinarily menacing eyes," he lacked charm. People found him unpredictable, divisive, suspicious and despotic, a martinet to all around him, driven by simmering resentments that often erupted in mad furies. By 1794 Catherine had decided to deprive Paul of the succession in favour of his son Alexander. It was within her rights to do so, but the decision was not made public and, when Catherine died two years later, Paul confiscated and destroyed many of her private papers.

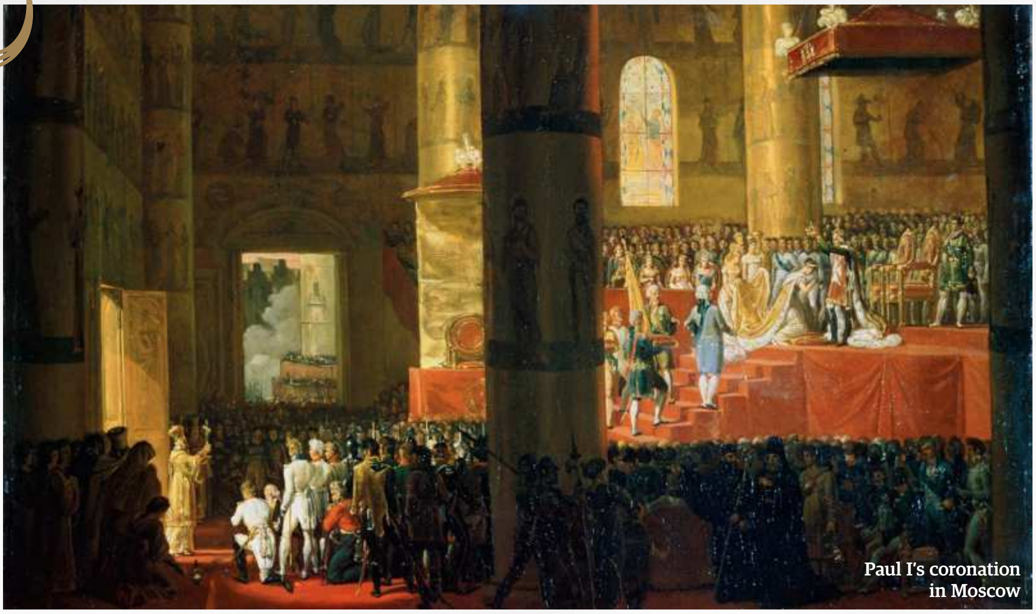
Once on the throne, Paul set about undoing his mother's legacy. To ensure that no woman ever ruled again, he instituted new succession laws establishing male primogeniture. Catherine's favourites were punished, and he issued a head-turning slew of laws – 595 in his first year alone – that undermined the aristocracy, strained the army and left the government in a perpetual state of chaos. Although he eased restrictions on the serfs, limiting their obligations and forbidding family separation, this did not stop him from rewarding serfs to those enjoying his favour.

Like his putative father, Paul worshiped the memory of Frederick the Great and idolised Prussian militarism. He outfitted his army in new, uncomfortable uniforms designed on Prussian models and made his soldiers relentlessly drill for hours and in all weather. Paul had a tyrant's love of punishment: if a soldier moved or failed to perform to his standard, the emperor would have him flogged, branded with a hot iron or sent to Siberia. He even took to hiding in the bushes, watching soldiers through a telescope in the hope of catching any mistake.

Paul used these men like tin soldiers, embarking on a bewildering foreign policy that seemed to change every year. He ended Russia's ongoing war with France, then a year later rejoined the campaign against Napoleon. When things went



A portrait of Paul I painted by Vladimir Borovikovsky



Paul I's coronation in Moscow

“Like his putative father, Paul idolised Prussian militarism”

badly he blamed his Austrian allies and, in a move that left Russia stunned, declared that he would fight with Napoleon, at the same time severing diplomatic ties with England. Soldiers never knew from one day to the next who their enemy might be. Most bizarrely, Paul wanted to send 20,000 Cossack soldiers to conquer India, a campaign that thankfully never materialised.

This chaos extended to Paul's domestic rule. Anyone who dared paint their house red risked Siberian exile. French tailcoats, hats and hairstyles were banned: soldiers roamed the streets of St Petersburg looking for infractions, stripping and arresting those who defied the emperor's sartorial dictates. Foreign books were forbidden; using words like 'assembly', 'citizen', and 'society' could land the offender in prison. Suspicious that everyone was plotting against him, Paul imposed a 9.00pm curfew on St Petersburg, making exceptions only for midwives and doctors.

Russia strained beneath this accumulated oppression. It was not long before people began speculating that the emperor might be mentally unstable. He suffered frequent hallucinations, rarely ate and could be found wandering alone in conversation. “The emperor is literally not in his senses,” the British ambassador reported. Paul suspected that his wife and eldest son were plotting against him and hinted that he might name his second son, Konstantin, as heir. Peter the Great, he pointedly reminded Alexander, had killed his own traitorous son. Soon, he warned, he too would be forced “to sever some heads fall that I once held dear”.

Not surprisingly, Paul's terrified family began to turn against him. “There is no-one,” his wife confided, “who does not daily remark on the disorder of his faculties.” Alexander, his eldest son, was confounded. “What is ordered today is countermanded a month later,” he complained. “It would be impossible to enumerate all the follies he commits; join to that a severity stripped of all justice, much partiality and the greatest inexperience. My poor country is in an indefinable state.”

By 1800 Paul had alienated nearly everyone: soldiers, government bureaucrats, aristocracy, the court and even his own family. His dizzying foreign policies, oppressive decrees and unstable rule had brought the empire Catherine the Great had so carefully nurtured to its knees. Paul had always feared cabals against him; ironically his own misguided actions led to a genuine conspiracy against him. The plot formed gradually, led by Count Peter von Pahlen, governor-general of St Petersburg and, ironically, one of the few men Paul trusted. He in turn drew in courtier Count Nikita Panin, General Levin August von Bennigsen and Platon Zubov, who had been Catherine the Great's last lover.

It was Pahlen who took the daring step of informing Paul's eldest son and heir Alexander of the plot, hoping to gain imperial support. Alexander was initially reluctant, though his father's mental instability and increasingly chaotic policies eventually convinced him to join the conspiracy. Pahlen won him over by promising that Paul's life would be spared. All the conspirators wanted was to confront the emperor and demand his abdication in Alexander's favour. Thereafter, the former emperor would be allowed to live quietly at any of his residences, provided he did not attempt to interfere in the new reign. Armed

A PECULIAR IMPERIAL FUNERAL

Determined to blacken his mother's memory, Paul I transformed her funeral into a spectacle of revenge

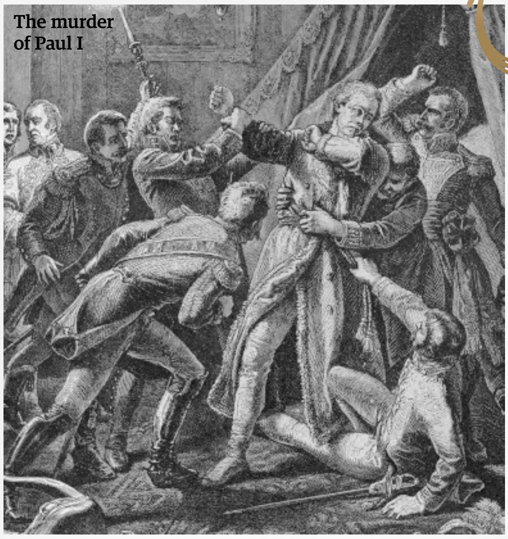
“My mother,” Paul declared on coming to the throne, “was too busy to arrange for my father's last rites.” The new emperor rectified this oversight in a most peculiar way that gave Russia a hint of the bizarre reign to come. He had Peter III's coffin exhumed from its tomb in St Petersburg's Alexander Nevsky Monastery and brought to the Winter Palace to lay in state alongside that of Catherine the Great. The Imperial Crown, brought from Moscow, rested atop his father's casket, while that of his mother, on a lower bier, remained bare. The funeral procession for the two dead monarchs to the Cathedral at the Peter and Paul Fortress, the traditional resting place for the Romanovs since Peter the Great, was an exercise in deliberate humiliation for Catherine's favourites. Those Paul suspected responsible for his father's murder, as well as many of her former lovers, were forced to carry Peter's coffin; in front marched the aged Alexei Orlov, suspected of having strangled the emperor and now bearing his crown through the icy streets.

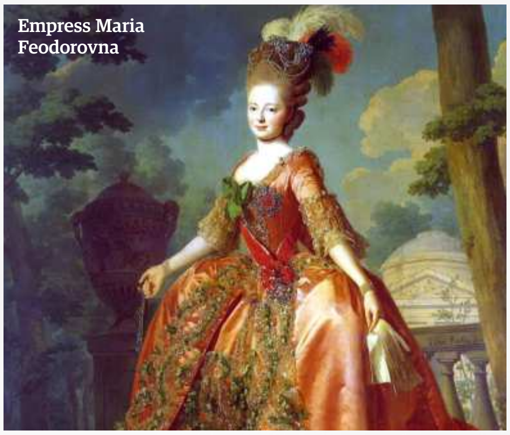
THE MIKHAILOVSKY CASTLE

It began as a monument to Paul's paranoia; in a self-fulfilling prophecy it became the site of his assassination

The building, or so Paul claimed, was divinely inspired: one day an angel appeared, instructing him to tear down Empress Elizabeth's Summer Palace in St Petersburg and on the site erect a palace dedicated to St Michael. Vision or hallucination, Paul obeyed. Rastrelli's elaborate rococo Summer Palace was razed and, in 1797, construction on the Mikhailovsky Castle began. Designed by Italian architect Vincenzo Brenna, this was a most curious structure, conceived as a literal palace-fortress built around an open courtyard. A moat, three drawbridges and a labyrinthine layout were meant to confuse and defeat potential assassins. There were secret doors, hidden staircases and an impregnable maze of corridors that led nowhere. Paul was so paranoid that he moved in before work was completed. Tapestries rotted against the still-damp walls, murals bled from moisture, fabrics on the furniture rotted, and a perpetual mist seemed to hover. Paul only lived in his fortress for 40 days before falling victim to assassination. Thereafter no-one from the imperial family wished to stay there, and it became an engineering academy.

An aerial view of the Mikhailovsky Castle


The murder of Paul I


Empress Maria Feodorovna

with Alexander's cooperation, the conspirators moved ahead with their plan. But, privately, Pahlen confided that violence might be necessary: "To make an omelette you have to crack a few eggs," was his ominous assessment of the plot.

In early 1801 Paul took up residence in Mikhailovsky Castle in St Petersburg. Here, in these still-unfinished rooms, his family passed uneasy days before his watchful eyes. By the night of 10 March the strain of the situation was obvious. After a concert Paul strode over to his wife and fixed her with an uncomfortable, accusatory stare before pointedly turning his back to her. When his sons tried to kiss his hand he pulled it back and stomped out of the room as Maria Feodorovna burst into tears.

The next night, and acting on advice from Alexander, who assured them that the guards around the castle would be unlikely to resist, the conspirators finally struck. Paul had gone to bed early after complaining of an eerie vision: when he looked at his reflection in the mirror he saw something crooked around his neck. The castle was dark when a regiment of soldiers joined the conspirators and marched on the structure. Bribed servants allowed them access. Less than a dozen men crept up a small spiral staircase that led to the emperor's apartments. Two footmen stood guard at the bedroom door: when confronted with this mob, one fainted and the other fled in fear for his life.

Paul had heard the noisy approach. The conspirators entered his bedroom only to find it apparently empty. It was Bennigsen who, in the weak light of a single burning candle, spotted a pair of bare feet hiding behind a screen; flinging it aside he found Paul cowering in terror. Together with Zubov he grabbed the emperor and dragged him to his desk. "You have ceased to reign," Pahlen said. "Alexander is now emperor. We've arrested you on his orders." With this, Pahlen pulled out the abdication document, but Paul refused to sign.

Precisely what happened next remains a mystery but, according to most accounts, Paul tried to escape. In an effort to stop him, one of the conspirators hurled a heavy gold snuffbox at him. Struck in the head, he fell, hitting the corner of his desk as he collapsed. Seriously wounded but still conscious, Paul saw the men advance on him. "Gentlemen," he shouted in French, "for heaven's sake, spare me! At least leave me time to pray to God!" One of the men grabbed a scarf, wrapped it around Paul's neck and pulled tightly until the emperor was dead. Alexander had rushed to the chamber on hearing the noise. Seeing his father's lifeless body, he collapsed in tears. "Now people will say I've murdered my father!" he sobbed. Pahlen grabbed his shoulders and shook him. "That's enough of your childishness! Go and start your reign!"

©Getty

ALEXANDER I

WAR & PEACE

Moulded from early childhood to be Russia's greatest emperor, the mysterious Alexander I spent almost his entire life lurking behind a series of masks

Words **Nick Soldinger**

On 25 June 1807, a raft with a specially constructed single-story structure on it was floated out into the middle of the Neman River near Tilsit in what is today Lithuania. The structure consisted of a roofed, lavishly furnished salon that was decorated with flowers, and boasted two finely carved weathervanes, one in the shape of the French eagle and the other in the shape of the Russian bear. It was anchored in the middle of the river where it looked, to all intents and purposes, like a floating stage set. Fitting really, because it was here that Napoleon Bonaparte, whose carpenters had built it, was to meet with one of the great actors of the age: Emperor Alexander I of Russia.

By the time their two-hour summit was over, a peace treaty had been agreed that would bring to an end to years of hostilities between Russia and France that had seen the Russian army crushed by the French and Europe transformed. Napoleon, one of the shrewdest political operators of his age, wrote of Alexander soon after this fabled encounter, "The emperor is intelligent, pleasant and well educated. But he cannot be trusted. He is insincere, a subtle deceiver, and a devious fellow." In the event, Napoleon's assessment was to prove correct. Within five years Alexander had broken the terms of the agreement and an even more costly war would break out between France and Russia - one that could only have one winner. Little did Alexander know that when he signed the treaty on that floating stage in 1807, he was setting himself up for a starring role in what would turn out to be one of history's most epic dramas.

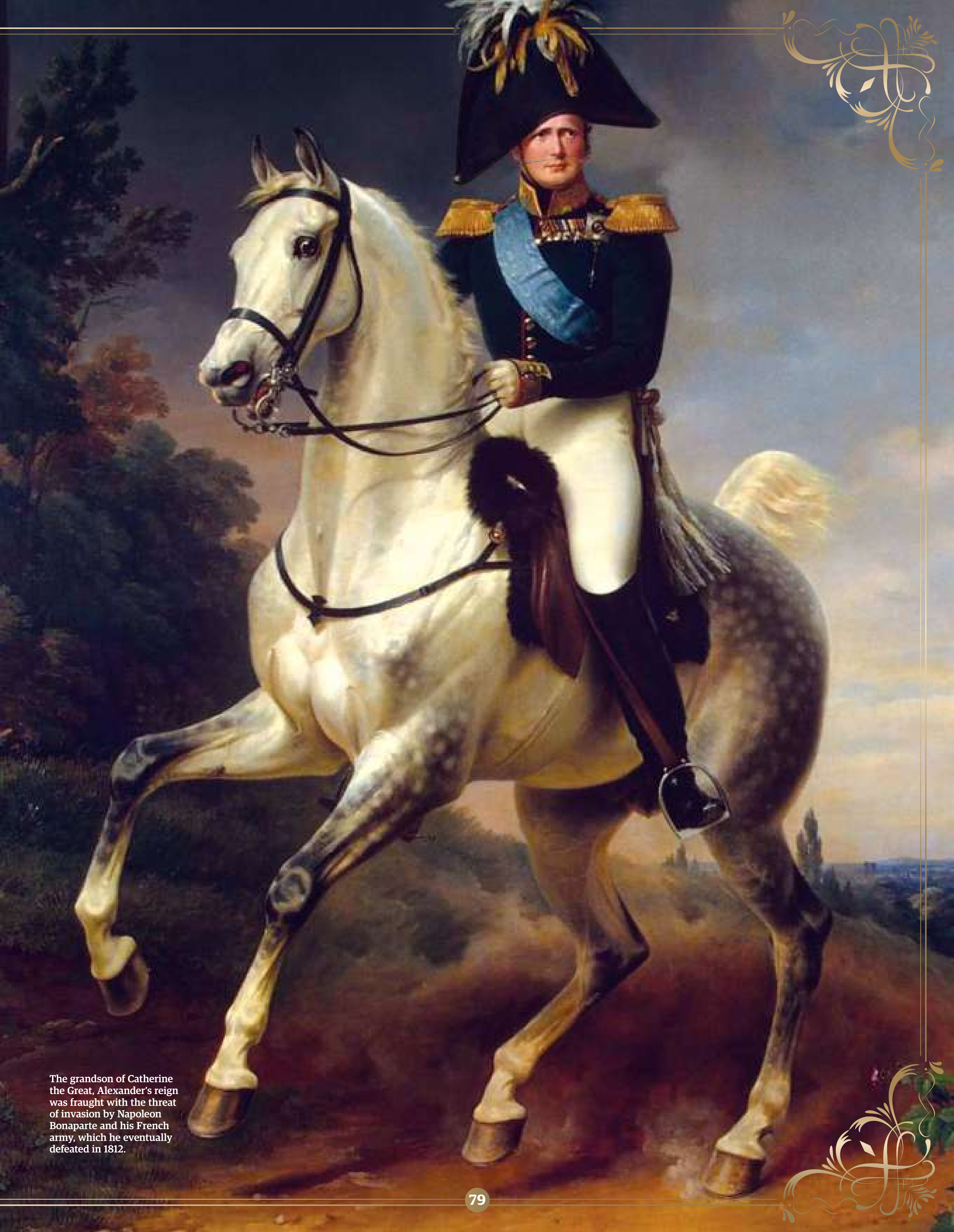
Alexander's skill as an actor had begun in childhood - and had been born of necessity. His parents were Maria Feodorovna, the former Princess of Württemberg, and Paul Romanov, the son of the brilliant but dominating Catherine the Great. At birth Alexander was taken by his grandmother to be raised by her, and it was she who'd named him. Officially she gave him the name Alexander in honour of the Russian hero Alexander Nevsky. In reality, however, she had the legendary conqueror of the ancient world Alexander the Great in mind, and set about moulding her grandson into someone who could one day rule a Russian empire as impressive as the one created by his 2,000-year-old namesake.

Alexander was a blonde, handsome, bright boy whose childhood was nevertheless troubled by emotional strife. Although Catherine poured all the motherly affection that she'd denied to her own son during his childhood, she was driven to do so by a powerful political agenda. Russian law allowed the country's monarch to name their successor and Catherine was disdainful of Paul, whose politics were reactionary, and whose personality was capricious. Sensing he'd make a very poor tsar, she made it clear - in private at least - that it'd be Alexander who'd follow her onto the throne.

The divisions in Alexander's family were to prove decisive in forming his personality. Torn between his grandmother and his father, the boy Alexander - who was always keen to please everybody - learned early on how to say the right things in the right company, changing his views and personality depending on who he was with at the time. He soon learned to develop different masks to suit different situations.

Perhaps the only person Alexander felt he could trust growing up was his Swiss tutor Fréderic de La Harpe. La Harpe was a republican handpicked by Catherine to educate the boy. She knew the teacher was no fan of monarchy, but she also knew that the Russian people were - for the time being at least - too politically unsophisticated to countenance another form of government. What she shared with La Harpe was an enlightened, humanistic vision for the future and these were values she recognised needed to be embraced by the Romanovs if their dynasty was to survive. As ever Catherine's judgement was to prove laser-accurate.

Not that Alexander's childhood or education would be permitted to last long. Catherine, clearly in a hurry and desperate for him to establish himself as a worthy successor to her, fast-tracked him into marriage. He was not yet 15 when she arranged for him to meet two sisters - German princesses of Baden - 13-year-old Louise and 11-year-old Frederica, bluntly telling Alexander to choose one of them to marry. In the end he picked the older sister Louise, who converted to Russian



The grandson of Catherine the Great, Alexander's reign was fraught with the threat of invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte and his French army, which he eventually defeated in 1812.

ON A MISSION FROM GOD

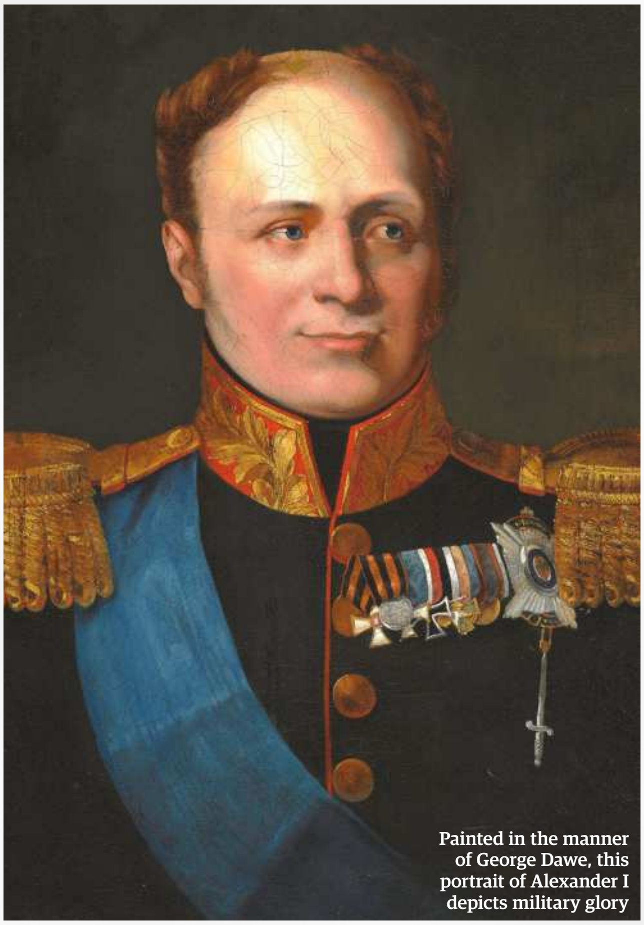
How Alexander found comfort in Christianity after the fall of Moscow, and his rapid escalation into religious zealot

As a child, Alexander was introduced to powerful progressive ideas about liberalism and the Enlightenment by his Republican-minded tutor Fréderic La Harpe. La Harpe's teachings, though, focused on abstract principles typical of the time rather than the type of concrete methodology that political and social science now offers. As a result Alexander started life as an open-minded liberal reformer but ended it a religious zealot.

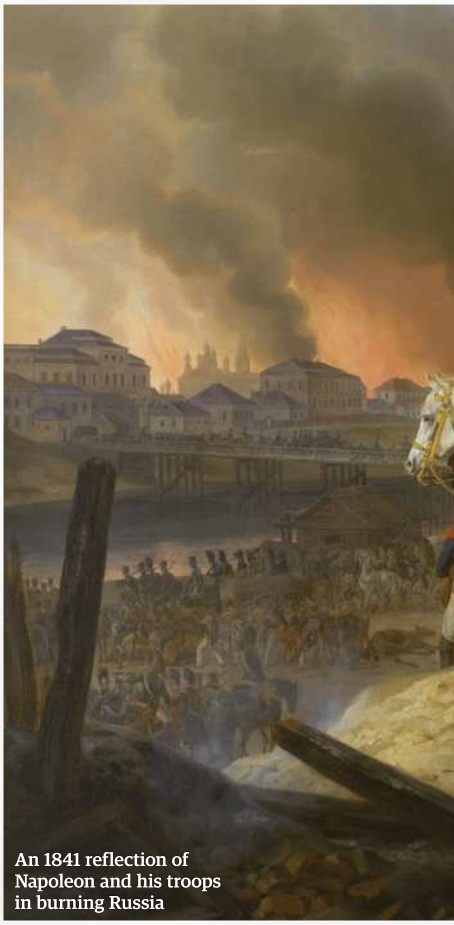
There are several factors that can be blamed for this: the guilt he felt over his father's murder; the responsibility he clearly took for the deaths of thousands of Russian soldiers under his command at Austerlitz and beyond; the strain of having to go toe-to-toe with one of history's greatest heavyweights in Napoleon Bonaparte during the subsequent invasion of his country. All of these things played heavily on Alexander's mind.

At his very lowest point, when news of Moscow falling on 14 September 1812 reached him, he was apparently so haunted by visions of his murdered father that he declared the invasion of Russia was some sort of divine retribution for the assassination. Alexander shared this crazy notion with his close friend Prince Alexander Golitsyn, who then apparently turned to the Bible for guidance, superstitiously dropping the book so that it fell open at random. The pages which emerged held Psalm 91. It read, "My refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust."

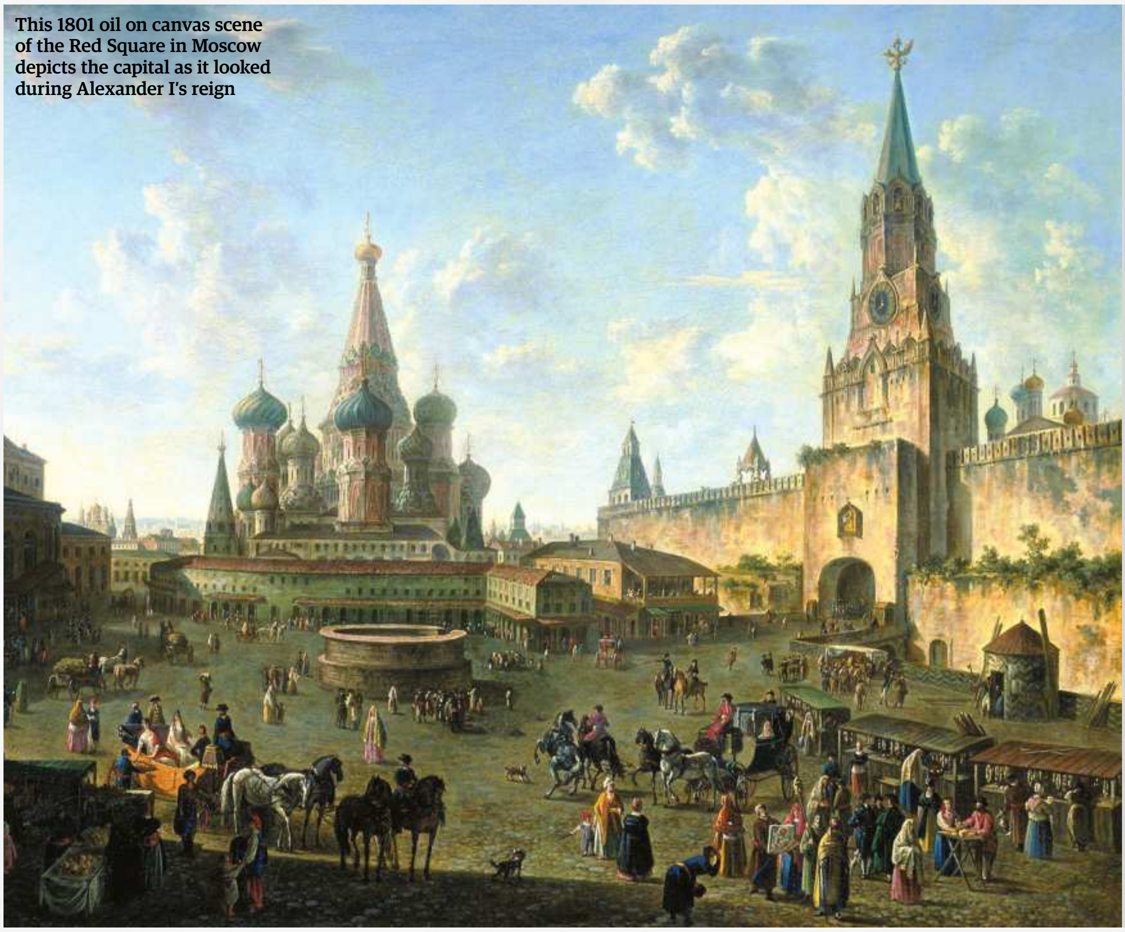
Alexander had never shown that much interest in religion before, but so desperate was he for hope that he clung to these vague words like a drowning man holding onto a life raft. He wrote to friend shortly afterwards describing his reappraisal of Christianity. "I devoured the Bible finding its words poured into me anew. Bringing a peace to my heart that I'd never known before." From now on, he told anyone who'd listen that he was on a mission from God.



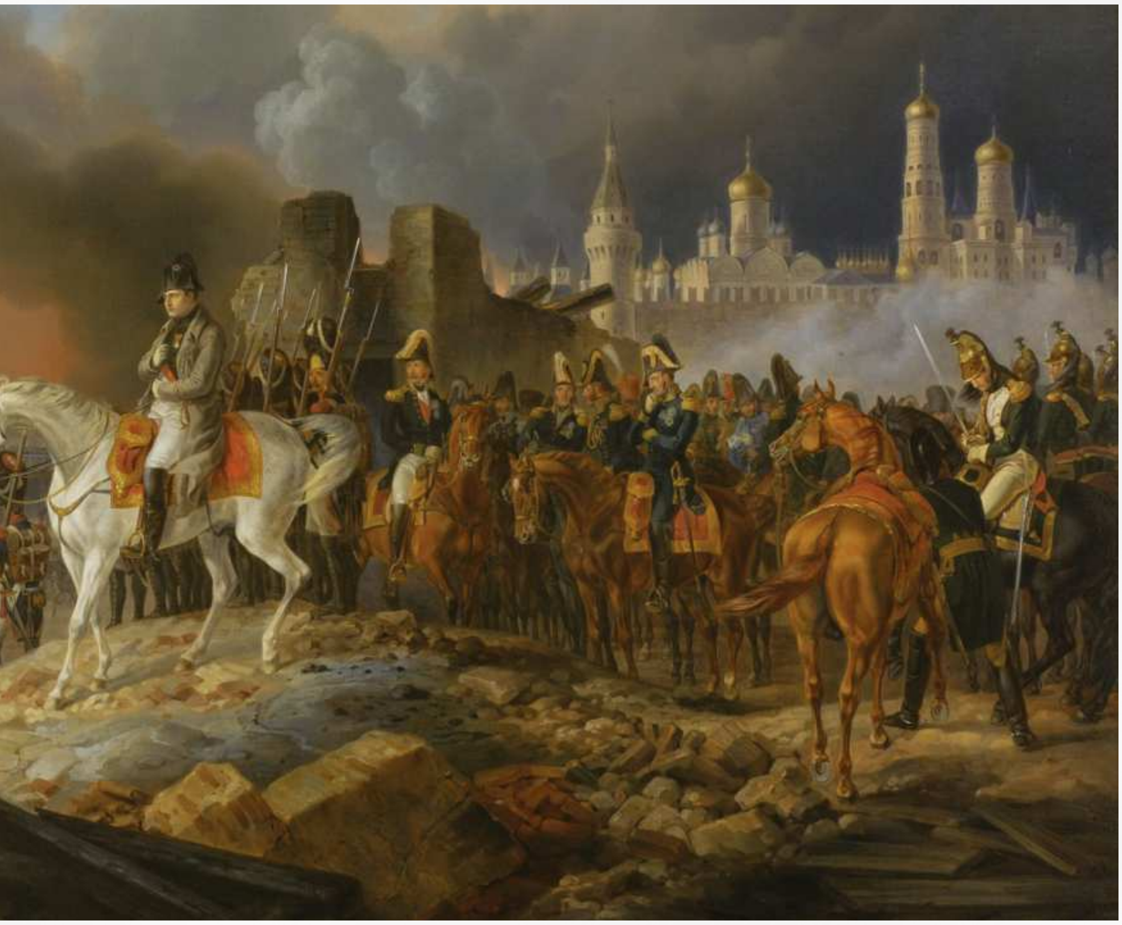
Painted in the manner of George Dawe, this portrait of Alexander I depicts military glory



An 1841 reflection of Napoleon and his troops in burning Russia



This 1801 oil on canvas scene of the Red Square in Moscow depicts the capital as it looked during Alexander I's reign



“AS MORE AND MORE PRESSURE FELL UPON ALEXANDER TO BECOME CATHERINE’S REPLACEMENT, THE LESS HE WANTED THE JOB”

Orthodoxy and took the name Elizabeth. They married in 1793 when he was 17 and she was 14.

With each passing year, however, as more and more pressure fell upon Alexander to become Catherine’s replacement, the less he wanted the job. He may have been born to kingship, but it was a prospect he detested. He dreamt of escaping such a suffocating environment and living with his new wife by the Rhine in romantic seclusion. In a letter to a trusted friend he confessed, “I realise that I wasn’t born for the title I bear now and even less for the one destined to me. I’ve sworn to myself to refuse it one way or another.” But refusal of position is something that few individuals born to rule have ever been able to pull off. Alexander was trapped, just as much as the millions of struggling serfs over whom he’d one day rule, by the rigidity of tradition, and an outmoded system. He’d spend a lifetime longing to escape from the role his grandmother had written for him.

In 1796, Catherine the Great died suddenly of a stroke. It’s thought she was planning to declare Alexander as her successor when she was struck down. Her son Paul now ascended to the throne, and a dark mood swept over the Russian Empire. Almost immediately Paul set about making himself unpopular with everyone from the peasantry and the army to the nobility. He issued a series of autocratic decrees that undermined much of the liberalising work done by his mother, and the masses loathed him for it, while the rich and the powerful began to plot his downfall.

It was only a matter of time before his actions would provoke a coup d’état. An aristocratic plot was hatched to overthrow Paul. On the night of 11 March, 1801, Paul was murdered in his bedchamber at the Mikhailovski Castle in St Petersburg by a gang of armed men.

Alexander was devastated and consumed by guilt, but he would be allowed little time to mourn. Crowned just 12 days later, he immediately began to revoke all of his father’s unpopular decrees, restoring rights and privileges to both the nobility and the common man alike. But Alexander wanted to go further. The liberal education he’d received in his youth had made him an idealist in the European Enlightenment tradition, and he now gathered about him a group of like-minded friends and advisers, to decide the best way to move Russia forward.

Within two years Alexander’s privy committee had created new government ministries to replace the old collegiate, established progressive education reforms that allowed universities to open their doors to everyone, and relaxed censorship laws. The first steps were also taken towards reforming Russia’s serf laws with a new decree issued that allowed peasants to buy their freedom if their owners agreed.

When it came to foreign policy, however, Alexander took sole responsibility for that himself. The greatest threat the Russian Empire faced at the time came from the newly crowned emperor of the French, Napoleon Bonaparte. Britain and Russia, keen to prevent Napoleon’s expansionist zeal, formed an alliance in April 1805. The Austrian Empire, which had been badly mauled in two previous wars with first Revolutionary and then Napoleonic France then joined this coalition. A showdown was now inevitable. It came on 2 December 1805 at Austerlitz in modern-day Czechia, then part of the Austrian Empire.

The Battle of Austerlitz that followed became known as the Battle of the Three Emperors, fought, as it was, on one side by Napoleon and on the other by Francis II of Austria, and the man named after the greatest warrior of the ancient world, Russia’s Alexander I. Perhaps buoyed by his grandmother’s ambitions for him to be a great martial leader, or perhaps jealous of Napoleon’s military glory, Alexander took charge of the battle himself and ordered an attack, overruling the advice of his experienced chief of staff Field Marshal Kutuzov for greater caution. It proved to be a disastrous decision.

Alexander saw his army crushed and then so thoroughly routed that he himself was forced to flee the scene to save his own life. More than 16,000 Russian troops were killed or wounded while a further 9,500 were taken prisoner. It was a stunning victory for Napoleon, who’d started the battle with almost 20,000 fewer troops than the Allies. For Alexander, it was a humiliation that would plunge him into the depths of despair and haunt him for the rest of his days.

Alexander would never again command troops in battle. Instead he would stick to his true forte - diplomacy. With his army in tatters, the flattery began almost immediately. In the wake of the battle Alexander sent Napoleon a message via a courier which read, “Tell your master I am going away, tell him he has performed miracles… that the battle has increased my admiration for him; that he is a man predestined by Heaven; that it will require a hundred years for my arms to equal his.”

Of course, it wouldn’t require Alexander 100 years to overcome

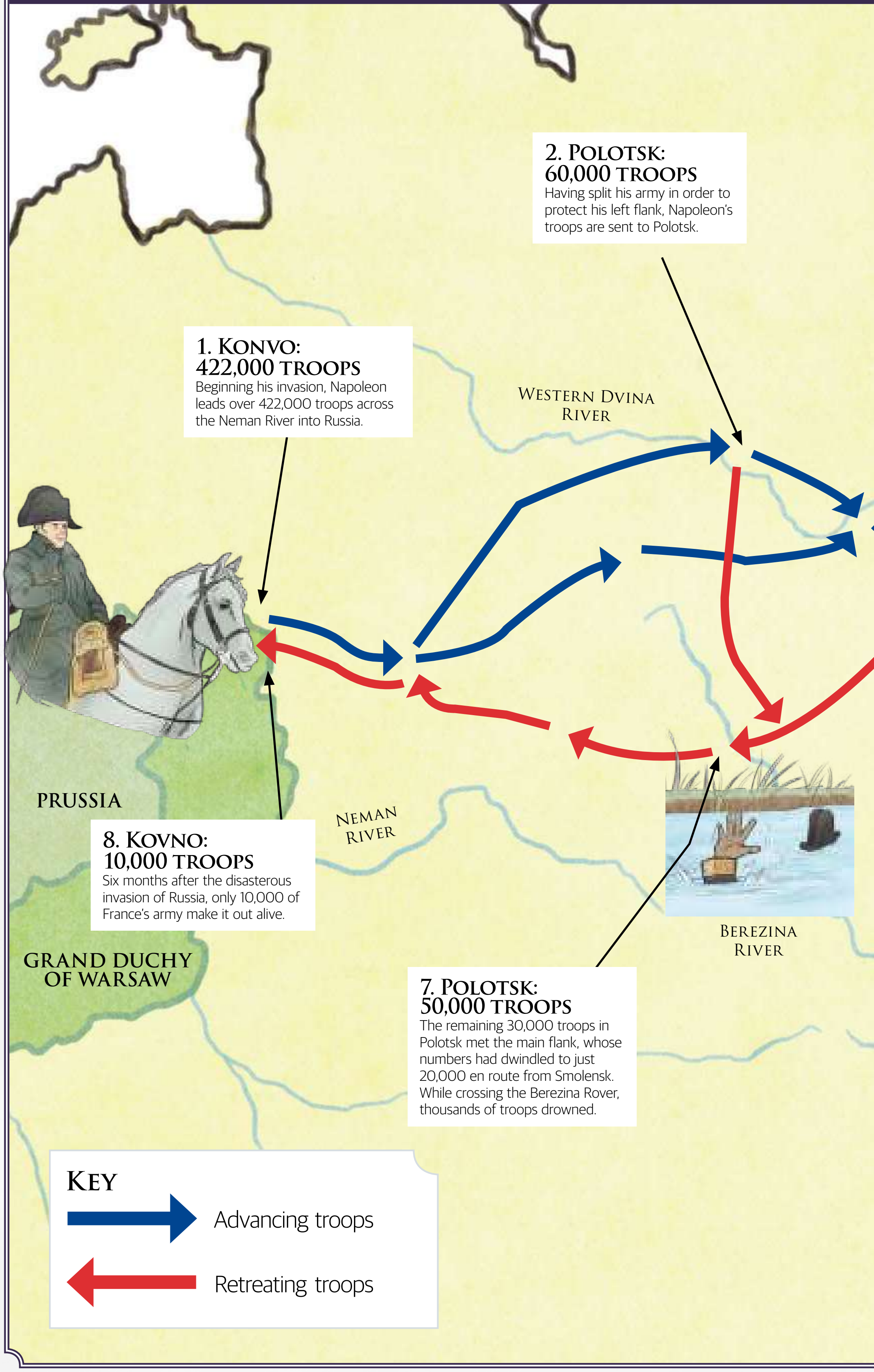
Napoleon, but it was clear he'd need to buy considerable time. Withdrawing his troops back to within Russia's borders, he watched helplessly as Napoleon began to dismantle the Austrian Empire, establishing obedient puppet kingdoms in its place, while claiming the juicier parts of it for France. By the summer of 1807, Napoleon's gaze again began to fall on Russia. Alexander arranged to meet with Napoleon face to face on that raft on the Neman River.

The peace treaty Alexander signed committed Russia to joining Napoleon's Continental Blockade of Britain. Britain's rapidly expanding empire, though, was turning her into a global superpower and the economic consequences for Russia to join Napoleon's Blockade were to prove calamitous, with her export trade falling by over 20 per cent. It was a price that Alexander ultimately could not afford to pay and by 1812, despite his country's economic difficulties he doubled spending on the army. There would be only one way out of the pact he had signed with Napoleon, and that was for Russia to fight her way out of it. When Alexander eventually withdrew his support from the Continental Blockade in 1812, he knew it would only be a matter of time before Napoleon would seek vengeance.

> "WITHDRAWING HIS TROOPS, HE WATCHED HELPLESSLY AS NAPOLEON BEGAN TO DISMANTLE THE AUSTRIAN EMPIRE"

That vengeance came on 12 June 1812, when Napoleon's Grande Armée of more than 422,000 men began crossing the Neman River into Russia. Despite his attempts at military modernisation, Alexander had no hope of matching Napoleon's vast force. With no more than 200,000 men with which to face Napoleon, however, Alexander was resolute. The following day he wrote to one of his field marshals, Count Saltykov, issuing orders and closing the letter with this oath: "I will not lay down my arms," he pledged, "so long as a single enemy soldier remains in my realm." One of history's most momentous sequences of events was about to unfold.

THE ILL-FATED INVASION OF RUSSIA



2. POLOTSK: 60,000 TROOPS
Having split his army in order to protect his left flank, Napoleon's troops are sent to Polotsk.

1. KONVO: 422,000 TROOPS
Beginning his invasion, Napoleon leads over 422,000 troops across the Neman River into Russia.

8. KOVNO: 10,000 TROOPS
Six months after the disasterous invasion of Russia, only 10,000 of France's army make it out alive.

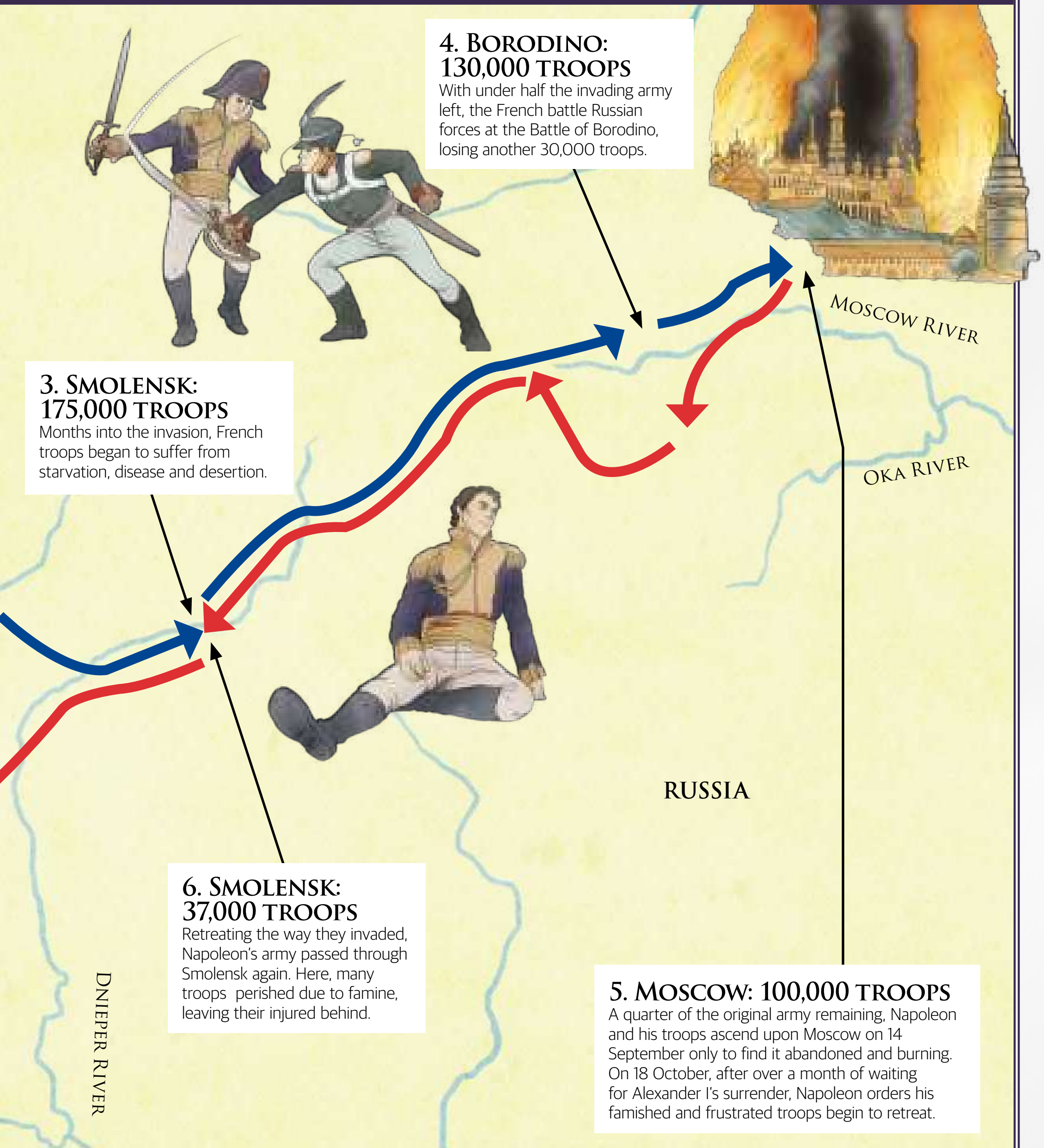
7. POLOTSK: 50,000 TROOPS
The remaining 30,000 troops in Polotsk met the main flank, whose numbers had dwindled to just 20,000 en route from Smolensk. While crossing the Berezina Rover, thousands of troops drowned.

KEY

→ Advancing troops

← Retreating troops

How Alexander I's caution won out in the bitter war of 1812



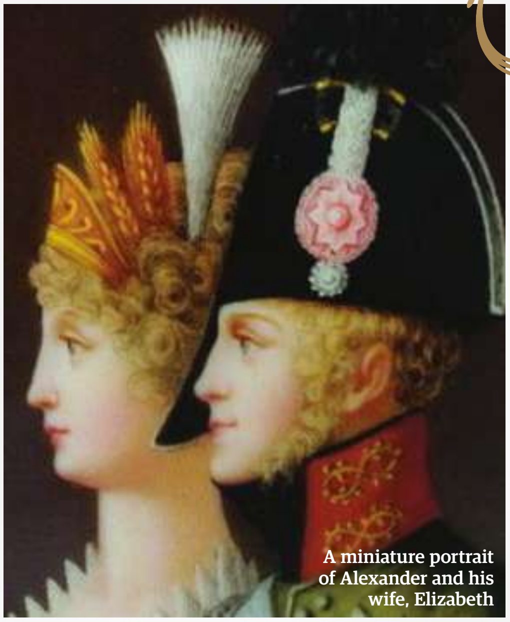
3. SMOLENSK: 175,000 TROOPS
Months into the invasion, French troops began to suffer from starvation, disease and desertion.

4. BORODINO: 130,000 TROOPS
With under half the invading army left, the French battle Russian forces at the Battle of Borodino, losing another 30,000 troops.

5. MOSCOW: 100,000 TROOPS
A quarter of the original army remaining, Napoleon and his troops ascend upon Moscow on 14 September only to find it abandoned and burning. On 18 October, after over a month of waiting for Alexander I's surrender, Napoleon orders his famished and frustrated troops begin to retreat.

6. SMOLENSK: 37,000 TROOPS
Retreating the way they invaded, Napoleon's army passed through Smolensk again. Here, many troops perished due to famine, leaving their injured behind.

> "MANY OF ALEXANDER'S GENERALS WERE KEEN TO CONFRONT NAPOLEON IN ONE GRAND OPEN BATTLE, BUT THE GHOST OF AUSTERLITZ STILL HAUNTED THE EMPEROR"


A miniature portrait of Alexander and his wife, Elizabeth

Many of Alexander's generals were keen to confront Napoleon in one grand open battle, but the ghost of Austerlitz still haunted the emperor. Instead, he decided to play the long game. He approved a policy of strategic retreat put forward by Field Marshal Barclay de Tolly, which would see his people abandoning cities and scorching the earth behind them as they went. The French were to be left nothing but a wasteland.

Napoleon's troops found themselves trudging further and further into Russia, searching hopelessly for the Russian army, intending to inflict a crushing defeat that would force Alexander to surrender. But for three long months the Russian army failed to materialise.

It wasn't until the French were just 70 miles from Russia's ancient capital Moscow that the Imperial Russian Army appeared. By now, it was back under the command of Field Marshal Kutuzov - the man that Alexander had so disastrously overruled at Austerlitz. Kutuzov now ordered that a stand be made near the village of Borodino. It was there, on 7 September 1812, that Napoleon finally got to take on the Russians in open battle.

The fighting was ferocious and when the smoke finally cleared the Russians had lost around 45,000 men - roughly a quarter of its army's strength. The French, meanwhile, had lost approximately 30,000 dead and wounded. Although Napoleon had once again been victorious in battle, his losses were to add to his mounting logistical woes.

Within a week, Napoleon was at the gates of Moscow awaiting Alexander's surrender. But no surrender was forthcoming and upon entering the city, he and his troops found it abandoned. Then, that night, the city suffered the same fate as the barren landscape they'd spent three months crossing - it was set ablaze. Fires swept across the city for four days, destroying three-quarters of it in the process. Napoleon, now desperate, sent a letter to Alexander offering to negotiate a peace. But there was no answer. Two more letters were also sent, but Alexander remained resolutely silent.

By now it was October. Napoleon's supplies were dwindling, and his Grande Armée's winter quarters were in ruins. Fearing that his troops would be swallowed whole by the bitter Russian winter, he ordered his starving army out of Moscow, and back across the 700 miles of bleak, deserted country through which they'd previously struggled. Harassed by Cossack raiders all the way, the murderous Russian winter now began to smother them, too.

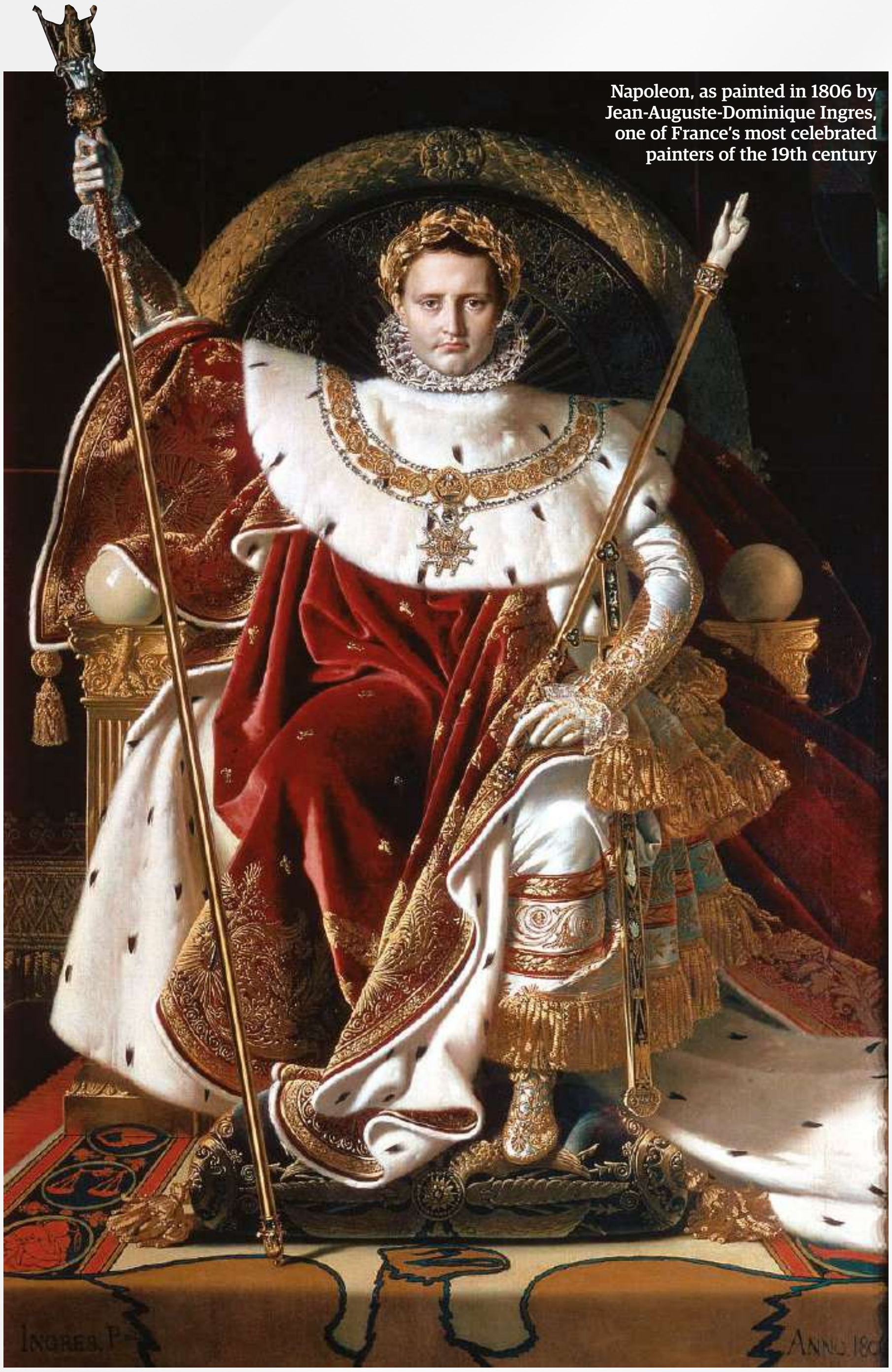
It became one of the greatest military disasters in history. By November, what was left of Napoleon's troops had reached the Neman River which they'd crossed so enthusiastically that summer. Napoleon had gone into Russia with almost half a million men, the biggest army that the world had ever seen. By the time he emerged again five months later, his Grande Armée had been reduced to a pitiful, frozen force of fewer than 10,000 men.

Russia's great war was over, but Alexander had every intention of exacting his revenge against France. The Russian army now went on the offensive, with Alexander determined to defeat Napoleon once and for all. Alexander chased Napoleon's broken, ragged force back across Europe, deposing the upstart monarchs that Napoleon had created and restoring the old order along the way.

On 19 March 1814 when the allied armies entered Paris, it was Alexander who led them in. All of Europe was in awe. In London he was made godparent to a future queen of Britain who was baptised Alexandrina Victoria after him. In Berlin the city's great square Alexanderplatz was named in his honour. In Paris, meanwhile, this emperor from the east impressed everyone with his enlightened ideas. He was now a celebrity and, of all the roles that he had played during his life, the part of triumphant sovereign was the one he enjoyed playing the most.

From Paris he travelled to Vienna, where a congress was held to decide what Europe's map should look like now that the Napoleonic scourge had been finally eradicated. Here the great actor shared the world stage with the shrewdest minds and slyest diplomats of the age. He played his part brilliantly, masking his true feelings and intentions so masterfully that he acquired a new nickname – Alexander the Sphinx. By the time the Congress of Vienna was over, he was a superstar. As well as being awarded huge swathes of territory, he left Vienna laden down with 55 additional titles.

Alexander returned to Russia a changed man. The war had hardened him and made him wary of future invasion. To this end, he came up with the idea of soldier settlements as a way of establishing a huge but cheap military reserve.

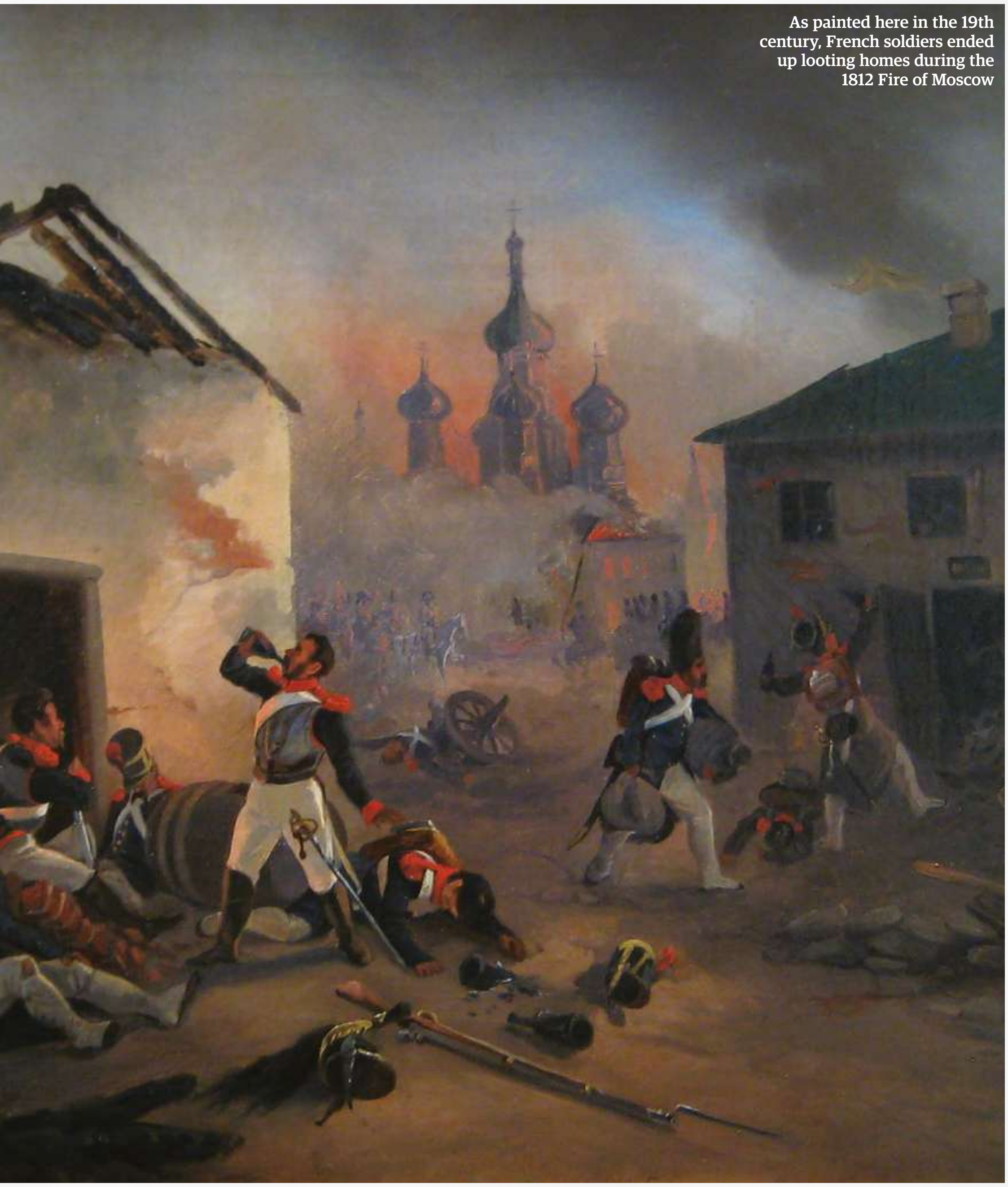


Napoleon, as painted in 1806 by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, one of France's most celebrated painters of the 19th century

"THE PART OF TRIUMPHANT SOVEREIGN WAS THE ONE HE ENJOYED THE MOST"

The idea was that these settlements would be places where soldiers could combine military service with farming. Alexander believed that everyone would benefit from the settlements. Soldiers could live with their families, the army could feed itself, while military order would ensure that these settlements were largely crime-free, self-governing communities. In reality, these martial communes were more like prison camps. Life was strictly regulated down to the smallest detail. Boys were enlisted into the army at the age of seven and came under the authority of the settlement's officers rather than their parents from that day forward. These unbearable conditions soon led to rioting, and as opposition and rumours of plots and schemes began to reach Alexander's ears, the once-progressive monarch began to radically change his views.

Alexander turned his back on tolerance and liberalism. Instead, censorship was tightened and so-called free thinkers were put under surveillance or sent into exile. This breakdown in his political



As painted here in the 19th century, French soldiers ended up looting homes during the 1812 Fire of Moscow

belief system, married with a gnawing sense of guilt over both his father's murder and the thousands of soldiers who died under him, seems to have reawakened his earliest objections about playing the part of ruler. "One needs to stand in my shoes to know what I feel," he wrote. "When I reflect that I will have to answer to God for the life of each one of my soldiers. No, the throne is not my calling. If I could with honour change the circumstances of my life I'd do it with pleasure."

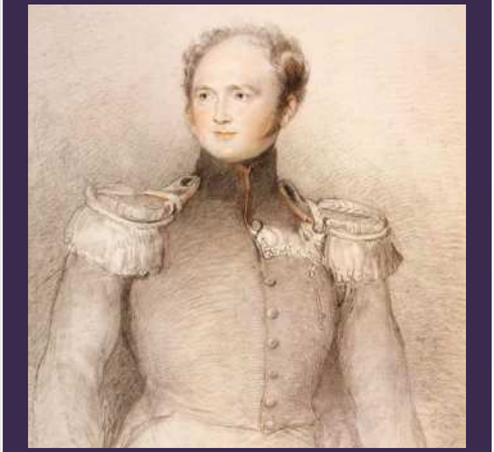
By now he was in his mid-40s. Swamped by self-doubt and unsure of what role to play next, salvation came from an unlikely source - his wife, Elizabeth. Although they'd had two children together - both of whom had died in infancy - Alexander and Elizabeth had been estranged for years. He now realised, however, how well she knew him, and how loyal she'd been.

Elizabeth, though, was ill. She'd recently been diagnosed with tuberculosis, and Alexander made arrangements for the reunited couple to abandon the damp climate of St Petersburg - where the official royal residence was - for warmer climes in the Russian Empire's south.

Alexander left first to prepare everything for his wife's arrival. He moved into a single-storey stone mansion on the Black Sea coast where it's said he swept the garden paths and helped arrange the furniture. When Elizabeth arrived soon after, the couple finally found peace. It was an idyll, however, that would be tragically short-lived. Elizabeth was by now terminally ill, but it was Alexander who would die first. After just two months of belated domestic bliss, Alexander died on 1 November 1825 after contracting a severe cold, and Elizabeth followed him to the grave six months later.

THE MYSTERY OF ALEXANDER'S DEATH

Did the emperor fake his own death to live the simple life he had always dreamed of?



One of the most enduring conspiracy theories surrounding the now defunct Russian monarchy is the ultimate fate of Tsar Alexander I. Did he, in fact, die as history would have it at aged 47 of a common cold? For nearly two centuries rumours have persisted that Alexander faked his own death to live the life of private citizen.

The sources of the ambiguity around his demise go back to the night he died, when it's claimed a soldier who was on guard outside the emperor's house saw a man matching Alexander's description sneak out of the house and walk hurriedly into the distance. Alexander's coffin was then kept closed throughout the funeral, leading to speculation that it was, in fact, empty. Then, many years later, a religious hermit called Fyodor Kuzmich was spotted in Siberia. He was a tall, well-educated man with clear blue eyes who seemed to display a great deal of knowledge about the nuances of courtly life under Alexander I. In fact, as one account has it, he bore such a striking resemblance to Russia's fêted emperor that one former courtier was heard to announce, "Good Heavens! It's our Tsar Alexander!"

Such was Alexander's legacy and so powerful was his myth that Fyodor Kuzmich was arrested and interrogated by Siberian police. Having committed no crime and with no real evidence to support the theory that he was Alexander, he was then released without charge. If Kuzmich had been Alexander then he'd managed to live the last 40 years of his life as a man free of the historical responsibility he'd been plagued by since childhood. Was it just coincidence? Or was Kuzmich the role Alexander had been aching to play all along? It's more likely to be the former but such was the power of Alexander's acting that many are still prepared to believe he somehow escaped the sinkhole of history.

NICHOLAS I

CATASTROPHE AT COURT

A martinet like his father Emperor Paul, Nicholas I saw his empire reach both the heights of polished glory and the depths of self-inflicted disaster

Words **Greg King**

It was not without reason that Nicholas I was known as 'the Gendarme of Europe'. A narrow-minded, reactionary man, he had never expected to reign. From his birth in 1796, he had been brought up as a soldier, expected to do his duty. Nicholas's tutors often beat him into submission, creating the suspicious and slightly paranoid personality that later emerged when he came to the throne.

The boy became a man, handsome yet somehow chilling, as writer Alexander Herzen recalled, with a face "expressing an unbending will" and eyes "totally without compassion". In 1817 Nicholas married Princess Charlotte of Prussia; she took the name Alexandra Feodorovna and theirs was among the most devoted of Romanov marriages. But domestic bliss could not overcome the trauma that surrounded Nicholas's accession to the throne.

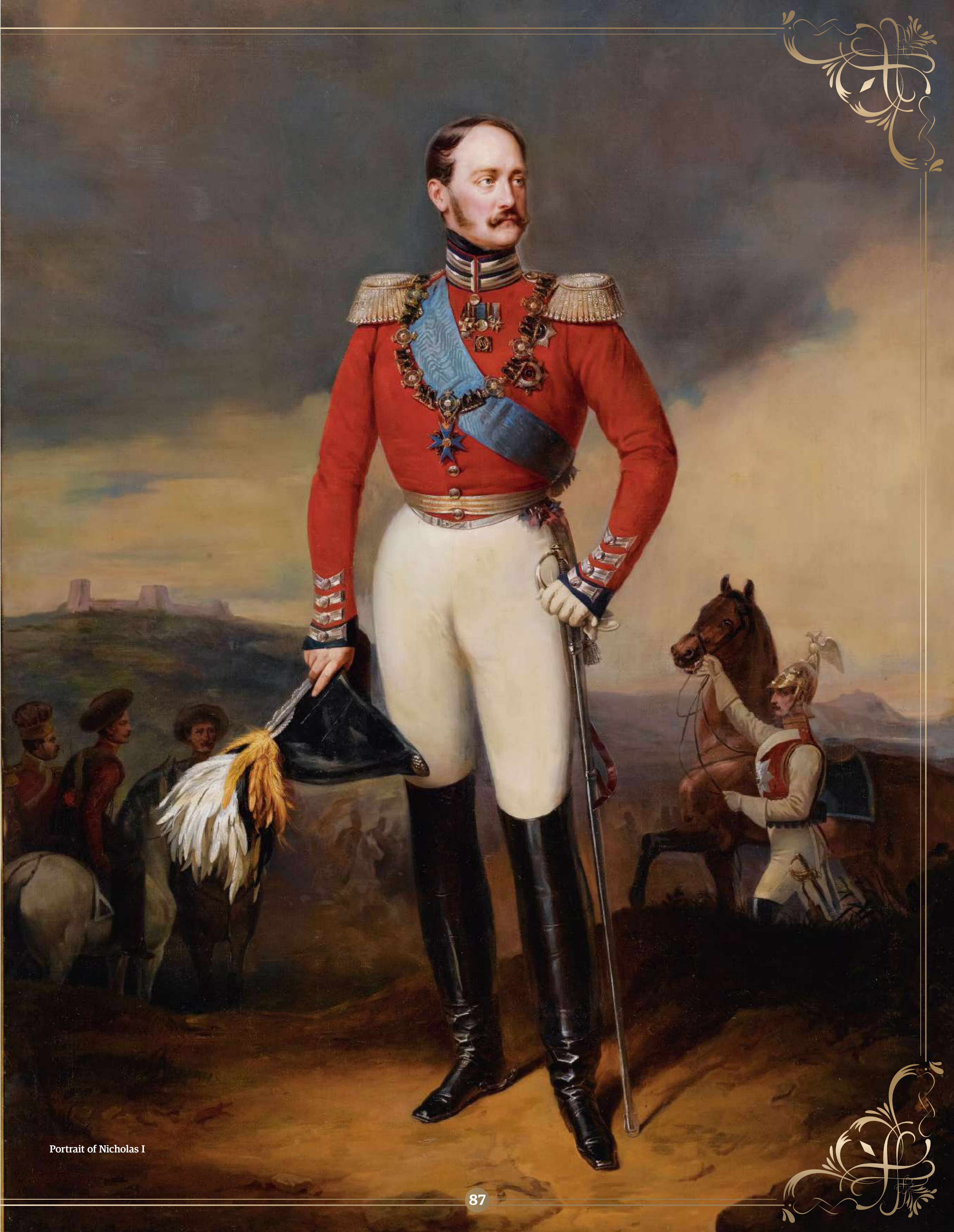
On 19 November 1825, Nicholas's brother Alexander I died without legitimate heirs. By law the throne should have gone to Nicholas's eldest brother Konstantin but, in 1819, Konstantin had secretly renounced his rights to marry a commoner. On Alexander's death Nicholas tried to evade his unwanted inheritance, swearing an oath to Emperor Konstantin. Russia was therefore stunned when, on 13 December, a manifesto appeared announcing that Konstantin had rejected the throne and declared Nicholas was now emperor. Believing that there had been an unlawful coup, and seeing an opportunity to demand change, some 3,000 officers in the Imperial Guard and their aristocratic leaders assembled that night on St Petersburg's Senate Square, shouting their demands: "Konstantin i Konstitutsia!" ("Konstantin and Constitution!") - apparently some naive soldiers believed that "Konstitutsia" was Konstantin's wife.

Nicholas didn't want the throne, but he was now all that stood between it and what he saw as the chaos of mob rule. He decided to face the rebels head on. "I'll either be tsar or I'll be dead," he commented before riding out to Senate Square. The rebels occupied one side of the square, facing some 9,000 loyal troops on the other. Nicholas sent an aide to reason with the insurgents after some shouted insults and some shot at him. Still, the emperor was reluctant to act against his own subjects. After many hours, though, and with the sun setting, he finally ordered artillery to open fire and his men to charge the rebels. No-one knew quite how many died as fleeing insurgents tumbled through broken ice on the Neva River. "I am emperor," Nicholas said that night, "but at what a price?" This uprising, known as the Decembrist Rebellion, was to have a terrible effect on his reign.

Nicholas ruled for 24 years, and managed some notable triumphs. Russia gained its first railway, a spur of track running from St Petersburg to Tsarskoe Selo, in 1838, and four years later work began on a line connecting the capital to Moscow. By 1829 his army had triumphed in the Russo-Persian and Russo-Turkish Wars, winning the Empire great expanses of the Caucasus and Central Asia. There were even efforts to improve the lives of serfs, though Nicholas was too tentative to make any real reforms. But the Russian Empire still lagged dangerously behind its European rivals in early industrial development and political progress: 19th-century Russia had the surface polish of the age, but it remained an essentially backward, agrarian country with ideas rooted in the medieval autocracy.

The Decembrist Rebellion had stamped itself on Nicholas's psyche. He became suspicious, and like his father Paul, began treating his empire like an army regiment, to be regulated, ordered about and deployed in the service of the crown. Previously the Empire had sought to emulate European ideas and appropriate its culture. Exposure to these liberal trends, Nicholas believed, had corrupted the Decembrist conspirators; his response was to turn his nation inward. Thus was born the Slavophile movement, which was largely to dominate Russian political thought until the end of the Empire. "Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and Nationality" went the popular slogan, which rejected Western ideas and culture and instead extolled all things Russian.

The natural result of this movement was repression. Nicholas established the Third Section of the Imperial Chancellery - better known as the Okhrana - as a secret police force to root out and arrest those suspected of subversive ideas. Books, newspapers and even art were subjected to heavy censorship. The Ministry of Education streamlined curricula, eliminating 'harmful' ideas deemed dangerous to the state; students, a particular worry



Portrait of Nicholas I

to tsarist officials, were spied upon lest they form troublesome affiliations.

Ethnic and religious minorities within the Empire were singled out for special treatment. Poland had the unique status of a semi-independent kingdom under the Russian crown. In 1831, after Nicholas repeatedly violated the country's constitution, a group of rebels made an ill-considered move for independence. The emperor responded by sending in his troops: dissidents were arrested, the constitution was abrogated and Poland was reduced to the status of a mere province. Catholic majorities there and in the Ukraine were often forced to convert to Orthodoxy in the name of 'religious harmony'.

The worst treatment, as usual, was meted out to Russia's Jewish population. Nicholas forcibly drafted Jewish males as young as 12 into special military training battalions, though compulsory service brought no rewards. Regulations forbade any Jew from military promotion. New laws curtailed Rabbinical schools and the study of the Talmud, and heavy taxes on those in the Pale of Settlement left many families impoverished.

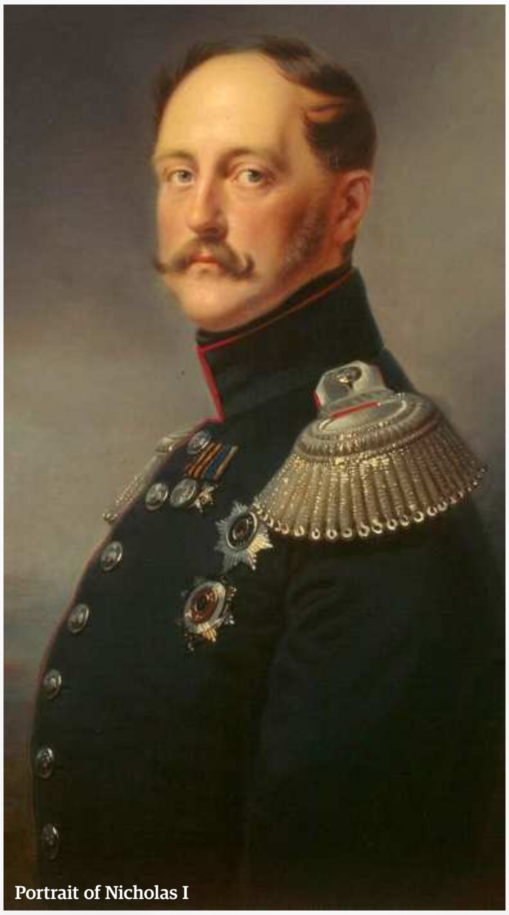
Above all, Nicholas was consumed with military matters. His army numbered a million men, but rather than focus on advanced training and arming them with the latest weaponry, the emperor was most concerned with appearances. Himself a stickler for sartorial order, he spent immense amounts of money equipping his soldiers with the smartest uniforms in Europe so that they would make indelible impressions on the parade ground. No-one could deny the splendid effect as cavalry troops, uniforms aglitter with gold braid, galloped by on their fiery steeds, but the men were ill-equipped for modern warfare.

And this deficit would become all too apparent when Nicholas foolishly embarked on the defining misadventure of his reign. Treaties signed between Catherine the Great and the Turkish sultan had guaranteed Russian warships access through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits to the Mediterranean; with this in mind the Russian navy had developed its Black Sea Fleet. But, in 1841, fearing Russian expansion, the European powers, led by England and France, had recognised the Ottoman Empire's right to restrict naval access through the Straits.

In July 1853, after years of protesting, Nicholas made a provocative move, invading the Turkish-controlled provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia. England, France and Turkey saw this invasion along the Danube as the first effort to seize control of Bulgaria, Serbia and eventually the crumbling Ottoman Empire. The emperor was convinced that neither England nor France would risk a war against him merely to uphold the Sultan. In the end Constantinople made the decision for them. On 8 October 1963 it declared war on the Russian Empire. Thus began the disastrous Crimean War.

In November the Russians engaged the sultan's fleet in battle at Sinope, utterly destroying the motley flotilla. Everyone expected this one victory to be the end of the conflict: the sultan had little more than a dozen ships left to his Empire, and for a war which would have to be fought along the Danube and possibly in the Crimea, the impracticality of moving the Turkish troops overland seemed a staggering setback. The Turks sued for peace, but when Nicholas proved intransigent about the terms, the European powers - fearing Russian expansionism - stepped in. Over 27 and 28 March 1854 England and France declared war on Russia.

A fleet of British and French warships set off for the main base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, Sevastopol. Both powers were ill-prepared and led by incompetent commanders. The British had only one reliable map of the Crimea - unfortunately for them it did not indicate water depths, and when they tried to land, their ships ran aground. The French navy, for its part, did not even possess a map, but developed a strategy based on two watercolour sketches of Sevastopol done by a visiting French artist a decade earlier. The British commander-in-chief, Field Marshal FitzRoy James Henry, 1st Baron Raglan, had seen no active military service for four decades, since he had been Wellington's secretary at the Battle of Waterloo. Now in his 80s, he had no idea of naval strategy; his mind was so addled that throughout the war he continually referred to the enemy as "the French" and became enraged when anyone tried to correct him.

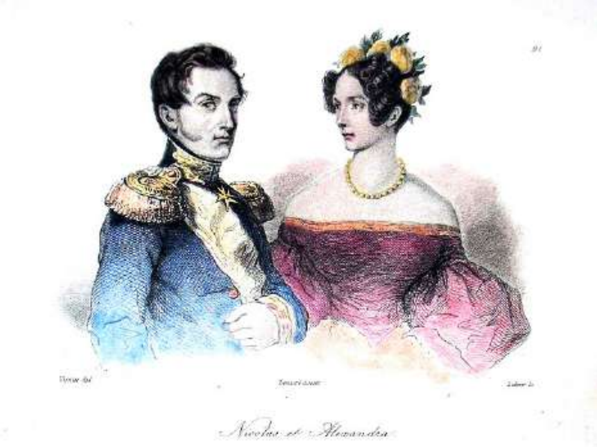

Portrait of Nicholas I

The Crimean War became a lethal farce, which dragged on for the next year. Sevastopol was

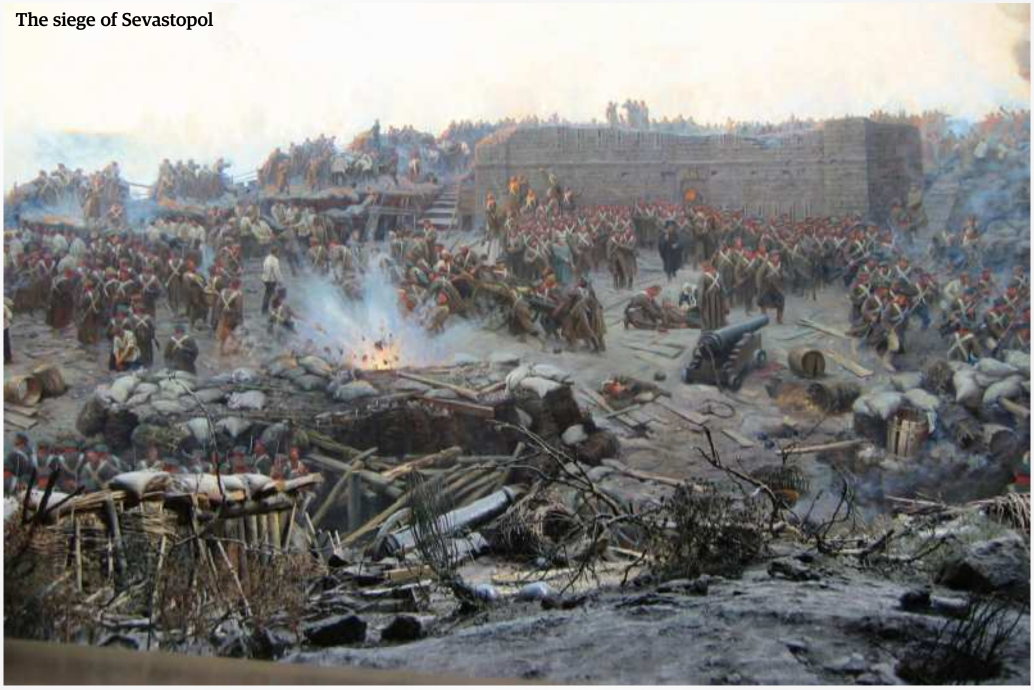
THE FIRST NICHOLAS AND ALEXANDRA

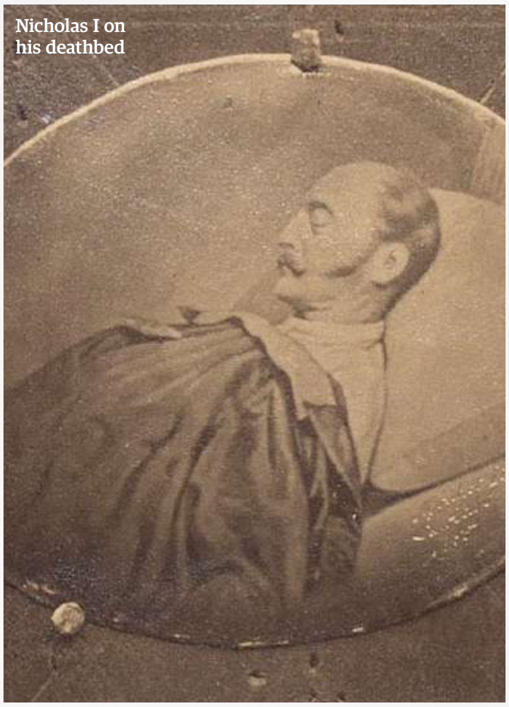
Like their more famous 20th-century namesakes, Emperor Nicholas and his consort Alexandra enjoyed an idyllic marriage

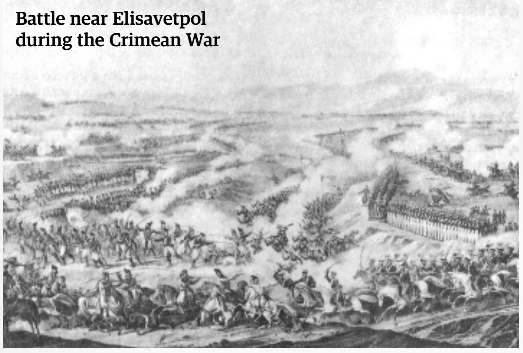
There was an irony in the stern life of Nicholas I: although the unbending martinet in public, in his private life he was an adoring, devoted husband and father. Like their more famous 20th-century counterparts, this Nicholas and Alexandra were deeply in love. Even after 25 years, noted a courtier, Nicholas acted as if he was "still on his honeymoon". When separated by duty, the emperor poured his heart into letters to his distant wife: "I have thought of you and cried for you," he wrote to Alexandra in September 1836. "Tears are always coming into my eyes." In a more reflective mood, he continued: "God has given you such a happy nature that there is no merit in loving you. I exist for you. You are me - I cannot express it any how else... If I am sometimes exigent, it is because I look for everything in you: happiness, joy, repose... I would like to make you a hundred times happier, as much as it depends on me, if I knew, if I could guess how to do it." Although Nicholas eventually took a mistress when doctors warned Alexandra to avoid sex, he remained devoted to his cherished wife.

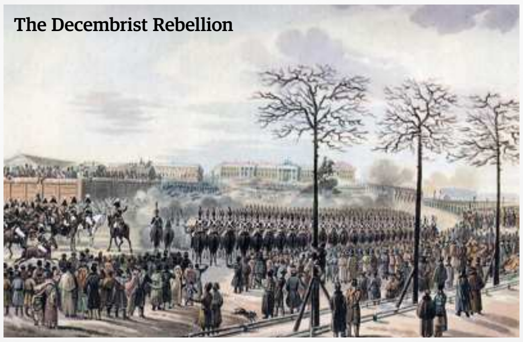


Nicholas and Alexandra at the time of their marriage in 1817


The siege of Sevastopol


Nicholas I on his deathbed


Battle near Elisavetpol during the Crimean War


The Decembrist Rebellion

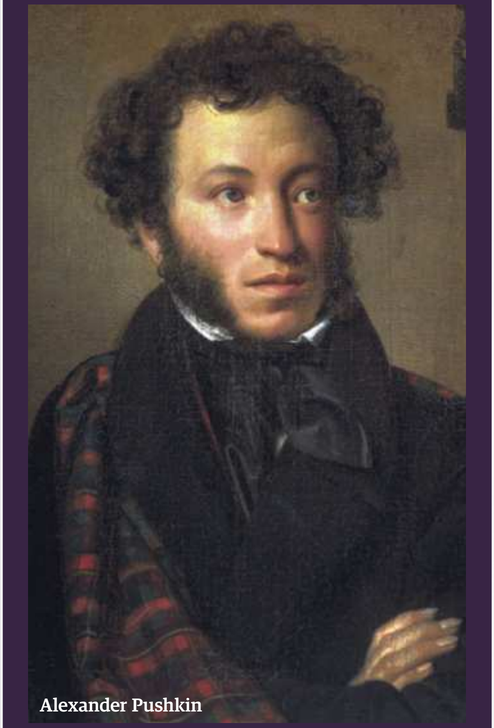
> "THE CRIMEAN WAR BECAME A LETHAL FARCE"

the prize, and for 11 months the British fleet effectively imposed a blockade, trying to starve out the Russians who had not succumbed to their incessant artillery bombardment. British and French troops engaged the Russians along the River Alma, making their way inland from the harbour at Balaklava to the valley where the heroic but inept charge of the Light Brigade took place.

Nicholas I did not live to see the devastating outcome of this conflict. At the beginning of 1855 he contracted influenza. Worn out, depressed and perhaps sensing failure, he refused all medical treatment, as if wishing to hasten his demise. On 18 February he died at the age of 59, a broken man. He had tried to hold his Empire in check while transforming it into a bastion of conservatism and failed. Not even repression and discipline could stave off growing dissent. Now it was left to Nicholas's son and successor, Alexander II, to clean up the dangerous situation he inherited.

THE FLOWERING OF RUSSIAN CULTURE

Nicholas I's reign was a time of repression, but it also witnessed the flowering of Russian culture


Alexander Pushkin

Despite the censorship that dominated Russia, the arts flourished under Nicholas I. Appropriate to this age of Empire, neoclassical architecture transformed St Petersburg with vast triumphal arches, celebratory obelisks and columned palaces swathed in lemon-yellow plaster. Clothing and jewellery, styled after ancient national models, become so popular that sophisticated Europeans eagerly snapped up anything deemed "a la Russe". Literature blossomed: the poetry of Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov gained widespread fame; Nikolai Gogol evoked less privileged lives in works that won him great popularity among the growing intelligentsia class.

Ballet continued its development towards the finest of visual arts, while paintings and porcelain gained international acclaim. The Empire also gained its first 'national' composer in Mikhail Glinka. He not only produced the first Russian opera, *A Life for the Tsar*, in 1836, but also provided the Empire with a new national anthem, *God Save the Tsar*. Europeans, who had always looked down on their giant neighbour to the east as a barbaric land, were suddenly enraptured at these unexpected bursts of cultural vibrancy.

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ALEXANDER II

LIBERATING RUSSIA

Alexander II was a man of contradictions. Swinging wildly between liberal and reactionary policies, he left a legacy of important reforms and personal failures

Words **Greg King**

For all of his repressive rule, Nicholas I had been farsighted in one thing: the education of his heir, who took the throne as Alexander II. From his birth in 1818 Alexander had been raised to be a liberal and progressive ruler; in this Nicholas I apparently recognised that change was inevitable. He himself was unable to implement serious reforms, but everyone expected that Alexander would be a different sort of ruler. They were not to be disappointed.

Alexander's first task was to end the disastrous Crimean War. Russia was exhausted and its military on the verge of ruin. The Treaty of Paris, signed on 30 March 1856, brought an end to the entire, ignoble adventure. Russia was forced to cede significant territories and lost its rights on the Black Sea and freedom of passage through the Bosphorus. For the first time in modern history, imperial Russia had been defeated.

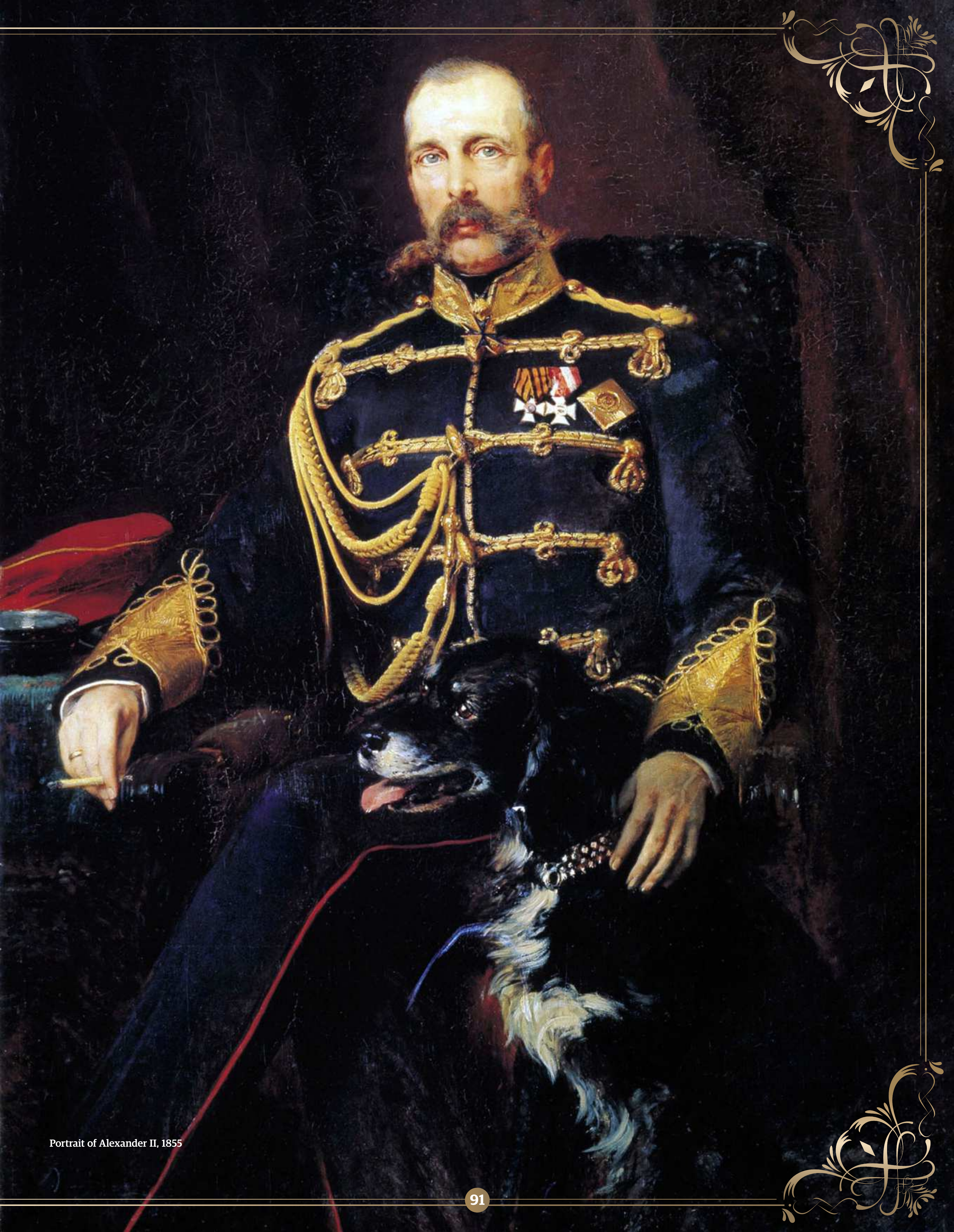
With peace accomplished, Alexander set about reforming his empire. The changes came in astonishingly rapid succession. The decimated navy was rebuilt and equipped with new artillery. The army was modernised: conscription extended to members of the aristocracy, and laws forbade commanders from using corporal punishment. New railways helped spread industrial development and for the first time Russia developed a working class.

Russia's judicial system was completely reorganised, with election of judges, elimination of secret hearings, and trial by jury. Alexander took the first, tentative steps toward self-governance by his people, establishing a system of district representative bodies called zemstvos. These were allowed to make decisions on local levels rather than rely on St Petersburg's bloated bureaucracy. Education was promoted and institutions of higher learning sprang up across the country.

Alexander II's greatest reform, though, came in 1861, when he emancipated Russia's serfs. It took four years of hard-fought battles against the entrenched powers: conservatives and aristocrats opposed the measure, loathe to lose hundreds of thousands of free labourers. But Alexander was adamant: "It is better to abolish serfdom from above than to wait for the time when it will begin to abolish itself from below," he declared.

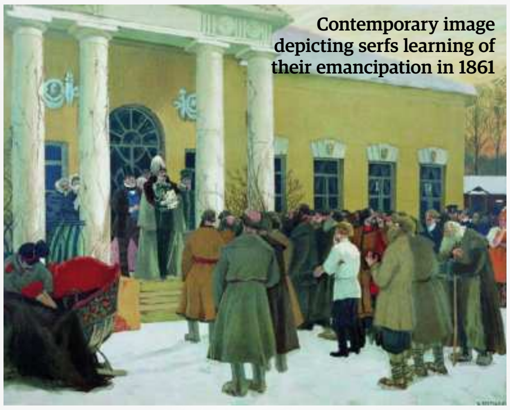
The announcement came on 19 February 1861. With the sweep of a pen, some 23 million serfs gained their freedom. For the first time in Russia's history, they could move about, marry, and own property without permission from their masters. The action won Alexander the epitaph 'Tsar-Liberator', but the end result often proved as disastrous as the inhuman system the emperor had abolished. The state advanced money to landowners who had lost their free manpower; in turn, these landowners were to give this money to the serfs so that they could purchase farms. But the terms of repayment were such that many of the freed serfs ended up being impoverished; when they could not repay the loans, the landowners likewise faced financial ruin. Though they initially hailed the emancipation, liberals soon decried the effects, while conservatives and nobles resented their loss of power and financial security.

Alexander II's foreign policy also seemed to seesaw in confounding ways. In 1867 he sold Alaska to the United States, fearing that the British would somehow invade it, and he allied Russia to Germany and Austria-Hungary by joining the Three Emperors' League in 1872. Neighbouring countries were treated capriciously. In 1863, Alexander granted increased autonomy to the Russian grand duchy of Finland: they were allowed to have their own parliament, currency, and to promote the Finnish language. Poland, on the other hand, remained a thorn in Russia's side. Opposing the subjugation imposed by Nicholas I, Polish nationalists took to frequent, open rebellion. In January 1863, Warsaw erupted in violence as partisans blew up bridges, cut telegraph lines, and murdered dozens of Russian officers. It took nearly a year to put down the disorders, and with



Portrait of Alexander II, 1855

Alexander II, circa 1878


Contemporary image depicting serfs learning of their emancipation in 1861

a draconian hand: thousands were executed or exiled to Siberia, Poland lost the last vestiges of independence, and even its language was banned throughout the country.

Russia's biggest foreign policy blunder was its brief war against the Ottoman Empire. In 1876, Ottoman-controlled Bulgaria rose up against the Turks. The revolt was crushed but Russian public opinion was outraged at the treatment of fellow Orthodox Christians. This religious appeal finally convinced Alexander to act: in April 1877 he declared war on the Ottoman Empire. Russia was successful in its endeavour: Bulgaria was liberated from the Turks, though at a cost of some 200,000 Russian lives. But this triumph evaporated over the ensuing peace talks. Afraid that Russia would use the victory to gain a foothold in the Balkans, the European powers united and forced Alexander II to accept terms agreed upon at the Congress of Berlin meant to prevent the tsarist Empire from expanding its sphere of influence.

The end of the war coincided with growing unrest against Alexander's rule. Both Paul I and Nicholas I had made a habit of isolating themselves in protective cocoons, but Alexander II liked to be seen among his people. On pleasant afternoons, he walked in St Petersburg's Summer Garden, attended only by an adjutant. In April of 1866, a young student named Dmitry Karakozov spotted him and made an unsuccessful attempt against his life; a year later, while Alexander was visiting Paris, a Polish national made a second bungled attempt on the emperor's life.

These efforts, by those espousing additional liberal reforms, ironically had the opposite effect. Alexander was confounded: he had made repeated concessions and yet found himself hated and derided as a tyrant. Conservatives remained disgruntled, while liberals pushed for self-governance and a more open society. Terrorism drove Alexander toward reaction: he turned his back on his previous agenda. The Okhrana began a clampdown on universities and newspapers faced heavy censorship laws; liberal advisers and ministers found themselves turned out of office, replaced with reactionary officials; and new military tribunals began prosecuting suspected dissidents.

This abrupt change of course only led to further discontent. Groups of disaffected students, workers, and would-be revolutionaries sprung up, determined to overthrow the existing order through violence. In April 1879, a former student named Alexander Soloviev spotted the emperor on his way to an appointment, aimed his revolver, and got off five shots before being wrestled to the ground. Miraculously the emperor escaped harm, but Soloviev was quickly tried, found guilty, and executed. In December, members of the revolutionary group Narodnaya Volya (Party of the People's Will) bungled an attempt to blow up the imperial train. Two months later they tried again, brazenly planting dynamite beneath the emperor's dining room in the Winter Palace. By chance Alexander happened to be late that evening and thus escaped, though 11 others perished in the explosion. "Am I such a wild beast that they must hound me to death?" the emperor exclaimed.

Consistency was never a strong trait among the Romanovs. Soon after the explosion in the Winter Palace, Alexander II appointed the liberal Count Mikhail Loris-Melikov as minister of the interior. The count advised immediate reforms to ease the tense situation: censorship was relaxed, taxes were lightened, and temporary restrictions on the zemstvos were lifted. By the beginning of 1881, Alexander decided to do the unthinkable and grant Russia a parliament and a limited constitution, hoping that such measures might win popular

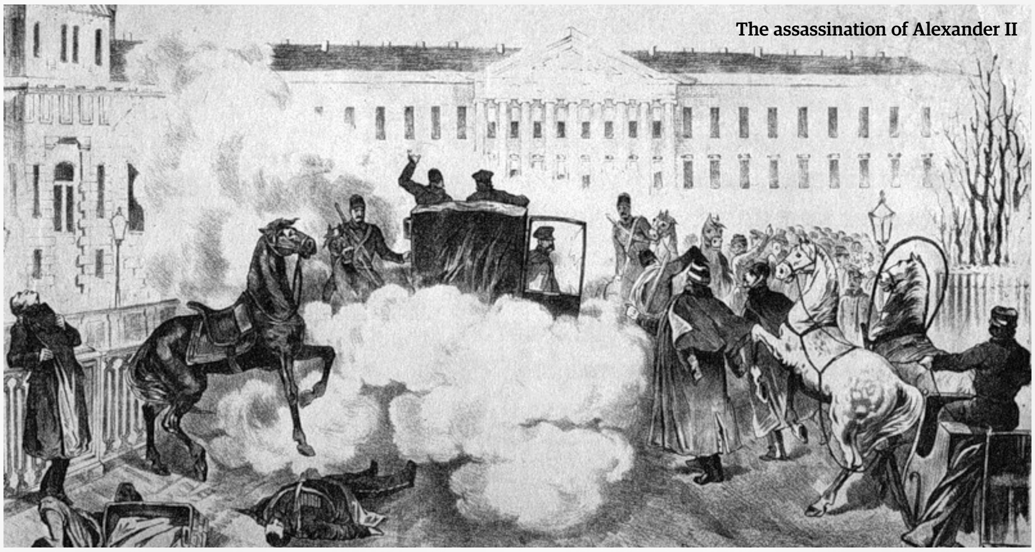
A SCANDALOUS LIAISON

Alexander II's audacious affair with a teenage princess devastated his family and left the country stunned

Alexander II always had a roving eye: despite his marriage to Empress Maria Alexandrovna, there were several mistresses and rumours of illegitimate children, though these affairs were always conducted with discretion. This all changed in 1866, when the 48-year-old Alexander began a scandalous liaison with 17-year-old Princess Catherine Dolgorukaya after bedding and discarding her sister. The emperor behaved like a lovesick teenager, confiding that they had fallen on "each other like wild cats". Declaring Catherine, called Katia, his "wife before God," Alexander assured her in shockingly frank letters that he wanted to make love to her "on every piece of furniture" and "in every room". Between 1872-78, Katia gave him four illegitimate children; in a turn that left his court aghast, Alexander appointed Katia a maid-of-honour to his wife and gave her and their children a suite of rooms in the Winter Palace, just above the apartments of the empress. He caused more offense in 1874 by bestowing the titles of Prince or Princess Yurievskaya on his illegitimate children.

Empress Maria Alexandrovna died of tuberculosis in 1880. Alexander waited just two weeks from her burial to secretly wed Katia. Inevitably word of the ceremony leaked out, and the emperor was roundly criticised for his apparent indifference to his late wife's memory, to his family's feelings, and to the dignity of the imperial throne. His heir, Alexander, was so enraged that he threatened to renounce his place in the succession, take his family, and leave the empire. The situation reached a fever pitch when Alexander II hinted that he might crown Katia as his new empress and legitimise his marriage and second family. Before the crisis erupted, though, Alexander II was assassinated. Katia took their children and moved to France, where she lived in semi-obscurity until her death in 1922.

Katia, Alexander II's mistress and later secret wife



The assassination of Alexander II

Alexander II on his deathbed

“TERRORISM DROVE ALEXANDER TOWARDS REACTION”

support for the throne. Though restricted in scope, these concessions would, for all practical purposes, end the autocracy.

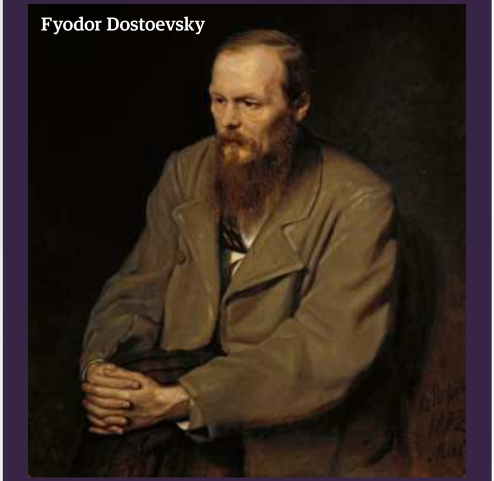
Alexander II signed the document and prepared to make it public: he never got the chance. On the afternoon of Sunday 1 March 1881, the emperor was driving along St Petersburg's Catherine Canal, safely ensconced in an armour-plated carriage, when Nikolai Rysakov, a member of the Narodnaya Volya, hurled a bomb through the air. In a flash of light and heat, the carriage shattered, horses bolted, and wounded members of the Imperial Guard fell to the snowy embankment. Miraculously the emperor emerged from the carriage shaken but unharmed. Seeing him, a wounded officer exclaimed, “Thank God Your Majesty is safe!”.

“It is too early to thank God!” came a shout from the crowd, as student Ignaty Grinevitsky tossed a second bomb at the emperor's feet. Windows shattered, the pavement exploded, and agonised cries filled the air. The smoke cleared to reveal Alexander II laying against a railing. One leg was missing below the knee, the other was a bloody, pulpy mess; blood oozed from dozens of wounds on Alexander's face and his torn stomach, staining the snow crimson. With his last words, the emperor whispered, “Home… to the palace… to die there.”

A sleigh rushed the emperor to the Winter Palace, as his family raced to the scene. For an agonised hour they watched as doctors hovered uselessly over the injured man, whose eyes stared vacantly. Finally Alexander's bloody hand fell to the floor with a thud. The new tsar, Alexander III, swept from the room with determined steps. Convinced that his father's liberal policies were responsible for the events of that terrible Sunday, Alexander III rejected plans for the proposed reforms and tore up the would-be constitution. Instead, he announced that he would maintain the “Justice and Strength of the Autocracy”.

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

The reign of Alexander II saw the rise of Russia's intelligentsia



Fyodor Dostoevsky

After the repression of Nicholas I, Russian literature and philosophy blossomed into a powerful voice for the dispossessed under Alexander II. The ‘Intelligentsia’ was born: factory workers and eager students who devoured Marx and Engels; would-be revolutionaries who joined anarchist groups dedicated to ending the autocracy; and moderates who pushed for liberal reforms within the tsarist system. Though divided in their aims, most shared a conviction that the absolute power of the tsar and the privileges of the nobility must change.

It was Fyodor Dostoevsky whose works best captured the angst and hopes of this generation. Deeming him a potential subversive, Nicholas I exiled him to Siberia in 1849. The experience seared and made the writer. When Dostoevsky returned to St Petersburg at the beginning of Alexander II's reign, he immediately set to work on a series of novels filled with the strife of tsarist Russia and the uncertainty of the times. His *Notes From The Underground* (1864) conveyed the squalid, hopeless life of a bureaucrat, especially when compared to the successful careers of his colleagues who cynically advanced through misery and revenge. The sense of alienation grew in *Crime And Punishment*, with Raskolnikov's murder of a pawnbroker and his redemption by a prostitute; *The Idiot*, with its twisted tale of sexual obsession; *The Possessed*, where revolutionaries take centre stage and commit murder to prove their loyalty to the movement; and *The Brothers Karamazov*, with its complicated repudiation of religion and embrace of humanist ideals. The books aptly summarised the tenure of Alexander II's reign, a time of tortured intrigues, warring philosophies, secret societies, and an overwhelming desire to change the destiny of mankind for the better.

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ALEXANDER III

THE LAST AUTOCRAT

Seared by his father's assassination, Alexander III launched his empire on a decade of repressive policies meant to preserve the autocracy

Words **Greg King**

Alexander III was to be Russia's last autocratic ruler. Coming to the throne in the aftermath of his father's assassination, he was convinced that Alexander II's liberal policies had led only to a growing revolutionary movement. Rejecting calls for reform, he would rule with a belief that the autocracy gave him absolute authority over everyone and everything, turning his empire into a semi-police state where censorship reigned, opposing opinion was silenced, and dissent was temporarily driven underground.

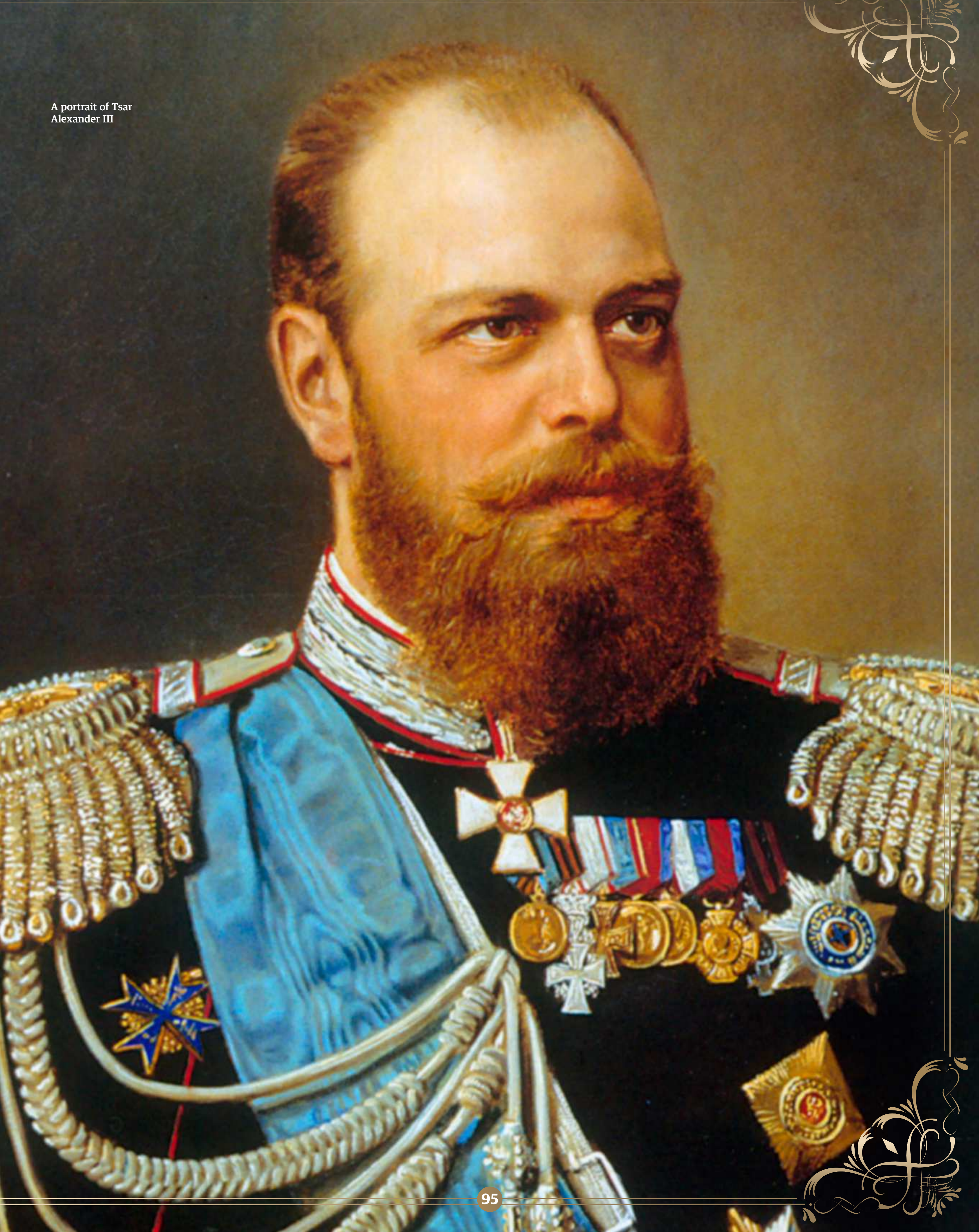
Alexander III cast himself in direct opposition to all that his father had stood for, and not merely in political matters. To many, Alexander II had seemed more European than Russian; his court was consumed with elegant manners and the niceties of appearance, even as he undermined previously exalted conceptions of the throne by so openly indulging in his torrid affair with Catherine Dolgorukaya. In contrast, Alexander III was proudly rough around the edges. He spoke in disarmingly gruff tones; hated the social and ceremonial obligations of his high office; was flamboyant in flaunting his happy family life; and rejected European refinement, ideas and culture in favour of all things Russian. A Slavophile at heart, he became the first Romanov sovereign since Peter the Great to sport a beard, in a nod to his Muscovite ancestors. Standing six-feet-four-inches, he was immensely strong and thought it was the height of amusement to twist iron pokers and horseshoes into knots to amaze onlookers. The unsubtle message behind such displays was clear: an iron hand now ruled Russia, and it would permit no further concessions.

The irony is that Alexander never expected to inherit the throne. His older brother Nicholas had been heir, and the emperor had ensured that he received a comprehensive, liberal education. But Alexander, born in 1845, was a second son and had endured nothing more taxing than the usual routine for any other grand duke: German, French, and English, along with a smattering of sciences, history, and military strategy. Then, in 1865, Nicholas died of meningitis. Alexander inherited not only his position as heir to the throne but also his brother's fiancée, Princess Dagmar of Denmark. They married in 1866 and Dagmar, who took the name Maria Feodorovna, provided Alexander with five children who lived to adulthood, including the future last tsar, Nicholas II.

Hoping to rectify the new Tsesarevich Alexander's inadequate education, the emperor tasked Konstantin Pobedonostsev to act as his special tutor. This was a curious choice for the reforming tsar: although he was a distinguished professor of law at Moscow State University and a rising bureaucrat in the tsarist system, Pobedonostsev was also a staunch conservative who opposed all hints of liberalism. He disdained the press, public opinion, and the very word 'reform'. Pobedonostsev had a particular hatred for parliamentary government: this, he warned Alexander, was "one of the greatest human delusions" of the era, meant only to gratify the "personal ambition, vanity and personal interest of the representatives themselves". To achieve true greatness, he taught, Russia must return to the roots of its success: a strong autocracy; a dominant Orthodox Church; and an enforced nationalism that repressed potentially troublesome minorities, ambitious bureaucrats, and wastrel aristocrats while exalting ideas of a happily subservient and loyal peasantry. It was a return to the days - and slogans - of Nicholas I; unfortunately neither Alexander III or Pobedonostsev understood that the days of absolute rule had long since passed. The autocracy in Russia hung by a thread, and all it would take was a swift cut to set the entire system tottering into oblivion.

The new emperor embraced these ideas once he came to the throne. The autocracy became a religious, not a political, institution, with the tsar as God's anointed representative on Earth. Clinging to this medieval notion of power, the emperor brought a repressive hand to his reign. He reversed his father's zemstvo reforms and imposed government supervision of small peasant farms and communes. The Okhrana arrested thousands of people suspected of having liberal ideas, and censorship was so tight that newspapers were forbidden from even printing the word 'constitution'.

Fear of assassination drove Alexander III to retreat to the suburban Gatchina Palace outside of St Petersburg. Some 5,000 armed sentries patrolled this isolated kingdom, attempting to protect the tsar from his subjects. But, though driven



A portrait of Tsar Alexander III

underground, revolutionaries still emerged from time to time. In 1887, police caught five St Petersburg students with an unworkable bomb, with which they hoped to kill Alexander III. All five were hanged, among them Alexander Ulyanov, older brother of Vladimir Lenin.

Promotion of the Orthodox Church led to the persecution of other faiths, and no group in tsarist Russia was as singled out as the Jews. Alexander III, like most Russians at the time, harboured strong anti-Semitic prejudices (he often derided them as 'Yids'). Seizing on the irrational (and untrue) idea that Jews had been responsible for his father's assassination, Alexander III issued the infamous May Laws in 1882. These narrowed the Pale of Settlement, forbade Jews from owning mortgages or purchasing property, rendering thousands homeless, and imposed travel restrictions that made it impossible to conduct business or visit relatives. Measures over the next few years dismissed Jewish officials from bureaucratic or government posts without pensions (unless they converted to Orthodoxy), barred Jews from the legal profession without special permission from the Ministry of Justice, banned them from military schools and academies, and imposed heavy taxes on kosher meats and even synagogues. Despite international outcry, most of these laws remained in place until 1914.

Although Alexander III was regressive in most things, his reign did see Russia make massive strides in matters concerning industrial development and infrastructure. Foreign investors backed new factories, and Russia tripled its output of iron, steel, coal, and oil production. New roads were laid, and the empire's railways greatly expanded to transport goods to the Far East and to Europe. This economic boom was a mixed bag, however. The changes were abrupt: Europe had been adapting to the Industrial Revolution for decades, while they arrived suddenly in Russia. Millions found employment in factories and industrial works, though they laboured under dangerous and often inhumane conditions. Ironically these same factories that propelled the empire into the modern age also became hotbeds of revolutionary discontent.

Alexander III also had the distinction of being one of the few Romanovs never to take his country to war. He inherited his father's participation in the Three Emperors' League, aligning Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. Alexander was a reluctant member: although his mother had been a German princess, his wife despised the Hohenzollerns of Prussia and gradually influenced her husband against Germany. When Kaiser Wilhelm II dismissed Count Otto von Bismarck as German chancellor in 1890, the Three Emperors' League finally collapsed.

Russia suddenly found itself isolated. Being empires, Germany and Austria-Hungary had been natural allies; the two remaining European powers - England and France - were both hotbeds of liberalism and representative government, ideas that were anathema to Alexander III. The tsar made a pragmatic decision. Great Britain, at the height of its power and undisguised in its imperial pursuits, posed the larger threat to Russian influence and colonial aspirations, while France, recently battered in its devastating war with Prussia, had no such ambitions. Additionally, French loans had bolstered Russia's economic development. It took a year for Russian foreign minister Nicolas de Giers to work out the improbable details but in 1891, Alexander III entered a secret military agreement with Republican France. After the Entente Cordiale added Great Britain, the alliances were set for WWI.

"ALEXANDER III HARBOURED STRONG ANTI-SEMITIC VIEWS"

Passengers queueing to buy a ticket for the Trans-Siberian Railway

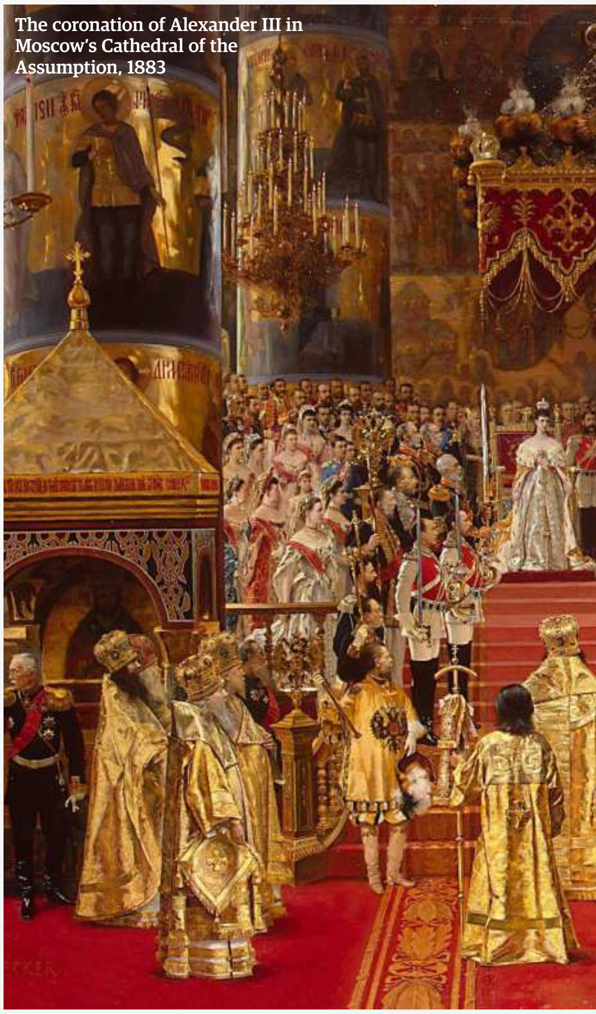
THE TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY

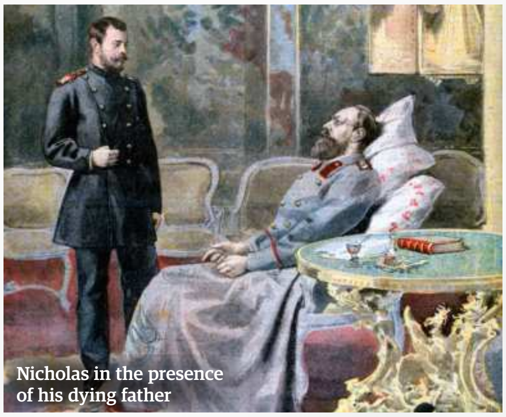
Construction of the immense Trans-Siberian Railway remains one of the 19th century's most audacious feats of engineering

When Alexander III came to the throne, the Russian Empire physically encompassed one-sixth of the globe, but it lagged woefully far behind modern nations when it came to its basic infrastructure.

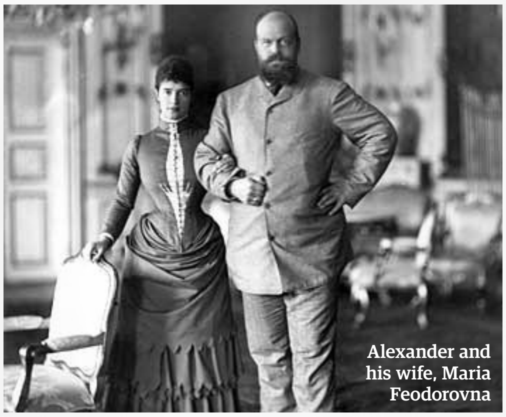
The focus had always been on Western Russia; the vast expanse of Siberia beyond the Ural Mountains, stretching to Vladivostok on the Pacific, was relatively untouched. Goods and supplies travelled by rail as far as the Urals, and then had to be packed on wagons, shipped by river or, in winter, dragged on sleds to the far-flung communities. And yet Siberia was rich with iron deposits, stands of virgin timber, and unmined minerals, natural resources that could bolster the empire's economy.

In 1891, Alexander III authorised construction of a railway line that would span Siberia and link Moscow to Vladivostok. Finance minister Sergei Witte took charge of the undertaking, which was largely built using convict labourers. The endeavour was dangerous: there were frequent landslides as passes cut through mountains, and many died in the harsh Siberian winters. Layers of permafrost in the tundra wastelands played havoc with the newly laid lines and timbers, equipment froze, boilers and furnaces burst, and there were frequent diversions around swamps and lakes. So immense was the project that it wasn't until 1916 that the 9,289 kilometre Trans-Sibherian Railway was complete.


The coronation of Alexander III in Moscow's Cathedral of the Assumption, 1883



Nicholas in the presence of his dying father



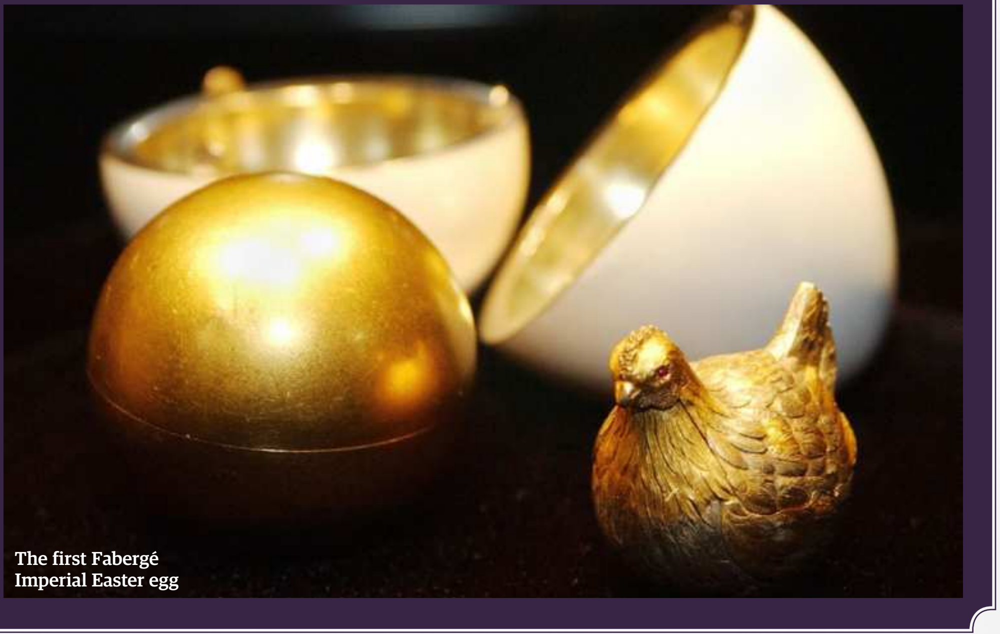
Alexander and his wife, Maria Feodorovna

FABERGÉ'S LEGACY

Among the cultural legacies of Russia, the fabulous imperial Easter eggs created by court jeweller Peter Carl Fabergé continue to capture imaginations

Peter Carl Fabergé was already a court jeweller of great renown by 1885. His use of gold, malachite, agate, coloured enamels, precious stones and polished metals in picture frames, animal figurines and miniature flowers had won him the patronage of not only the Romanovs but also the Danish and British royal families. But that year, he received a commission from Alexander III that cemented Fabergé's reputation as an extraordinary craftsman.

Fabergé was not the first jeweller to create surprise Easter eggs, but his use of materials as well as the intricacy of the miniature surprises set his designs apart and raised them to true works of art in their own right. Alexander III had asked for something to delight his wife, who was still greatly upset by Alexander II's assassination and the uncertainty surrounding the throne. Fabergé created an egg in the form of a simple white enamel shell: when broken apart, it revealed a golden yoke containing a smaller chased gold hen with ruby eyes, which in turn concealed a small pendant. The empress was delighted, and the presentation of a Fabergé Easter egg became a tradition that continued until the Revolution.



The first Fabergé Imperial Easter egg

In October 1888, the train carrying Alexander III and his family suddenly jumped the tracks and plunged down a steep embankment. According to legend, Alexander held aloft the remains of the dining car's collapsed roof, permitting them to crawl to freedom. It was not, as initially feared, the work of anarchists: the train had simply been travelling too fast. But the effect on Alexander was immediate. He became suspicious, and took to drinking more and more against the advice of his doctors. Within a few years he began complaining of exhaustion, insomnia, and kidney pains.

No-one knew that anything was seriously wrong until the autumn of 1894, when doctors finally diagnosed incurable nephritis. Hoping to prolong the tsar's life, they moved him to Livadia, the Romanov estate on the shores of the Black Sea in the Crimea, where the imperial family gathered to await the end. Among those arriving was Princess Alix of Hesse, the fiancée of Alexander's heir Tsesarevich Nicholas; despite his illness, the emperor insisted on receiving her wearing his full dress uniform, an effort that left him exhausted.

Insomnia, nose bleeds, and aching joints marked Alexander III's last days. On the afternoon of 20 October 1894, as Marie Feodorovna cradled her husband in her arms, Alexander muttered, "I know I am dying, but I wish you to know that I have always tried to do my best for all. And I am not afraid, no, I am not afraid. And I wish you to tell my people that I have no fear." Just after 2pm, his head dropped to his chest. The formidable Alexander III, emperor of Russia, lay dead at the age of 49.

There was a grisly footnote. Alexander III's body would be taken first to Moscow and then to St Petersburg, and be on display for three weeks. According to Orthodox custom, mourners had to kiss his lips at the end of services. The body lay untouched for nearly two days before it was embalmed, and had already begun to deteriorate when the morticians finally arrived. The smell was appalling. By the time the emperor was finally buried in St Petersburg, his face had turned black.

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NICHOLAS II

CURSE OF THE TSAR

Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra shared one of history's greatest royal love stories, but they also shared responsibility for the revolution that ended the Russian throne

Words **Greg King**

Three months into the Great War, Tsar Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary. On a cold November day back in 1894, when the handsome Nicholas had married Queen Victoria's beautiful Hessian granddaughter, the future had seemed full of promise. Both were young and absolutely devoted to each other.

They had first met in 1884, when her sister Elisabeth married his uncle Grand Duke Sergei - "We love each other," Nicholas had noted of the childish flirtation. They met again five years later, when Alix spent the winter of 1889 with her sister in St Petersburg. Nicholas was now 21, his expressive blue eyes and his slight figure sleek in a dashing military uniform, while the Hessian princess had blossomed into a statuesque 16-year-old with long golden hair and a mind filled with high ideals. They went to skating parties, danced at balls and soon the flirtation had blossomed into serious romance. "My dream is to marry Alix of Hesse," Nicholas had recorded in his diary in 1892.

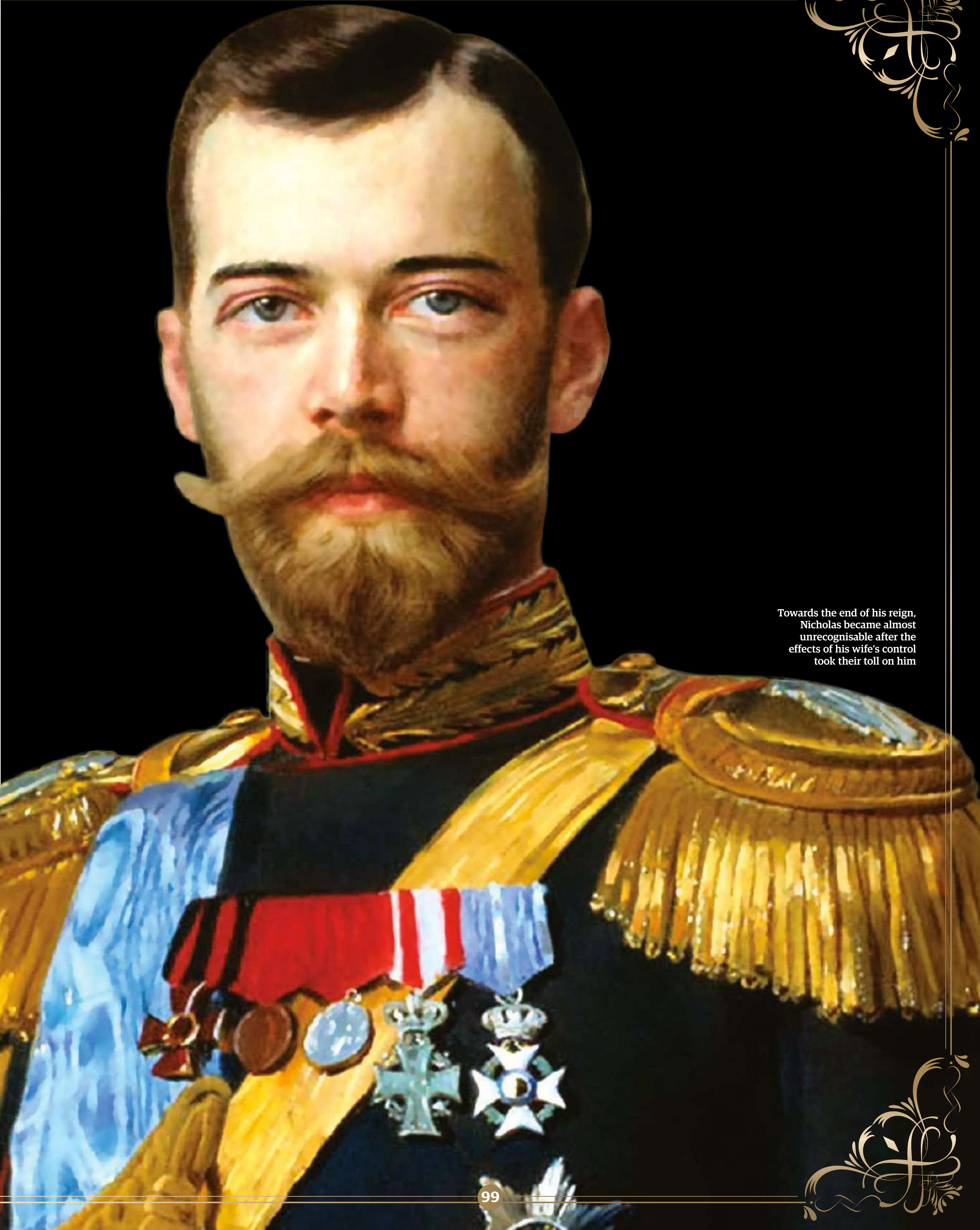
It had taken years of convincing before the Lutheran Alix of Hesse agreed to change her faith and accept Nicholas's proposal: "I cannot go against my conscience," she had written to him in autumn 1893. But Nicholas persisted, and during a family wedding in April 1894, Alix finally relented. The joy of their engagement was short: in the autumn of 1894, Nicholas's father, Tsar Alexander III, died prematurely and an overwhelmed 26-year-old Nicholas came to the throne, marrying Alix - who adopted the name Alexandra on converting to Orthodoxy - just a week after burying his father. "I love you," she had assured Nicholas the day after their wedding. "Those three words have my life in them."

That love offered comfort throughout the coming tumultuous years. In quick succession, Alexandra gave birth to four daughters, Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia, but the male heir that the couple so desperately wanted - and the succession of the imperial throne demanded - eluded the imperial couple.

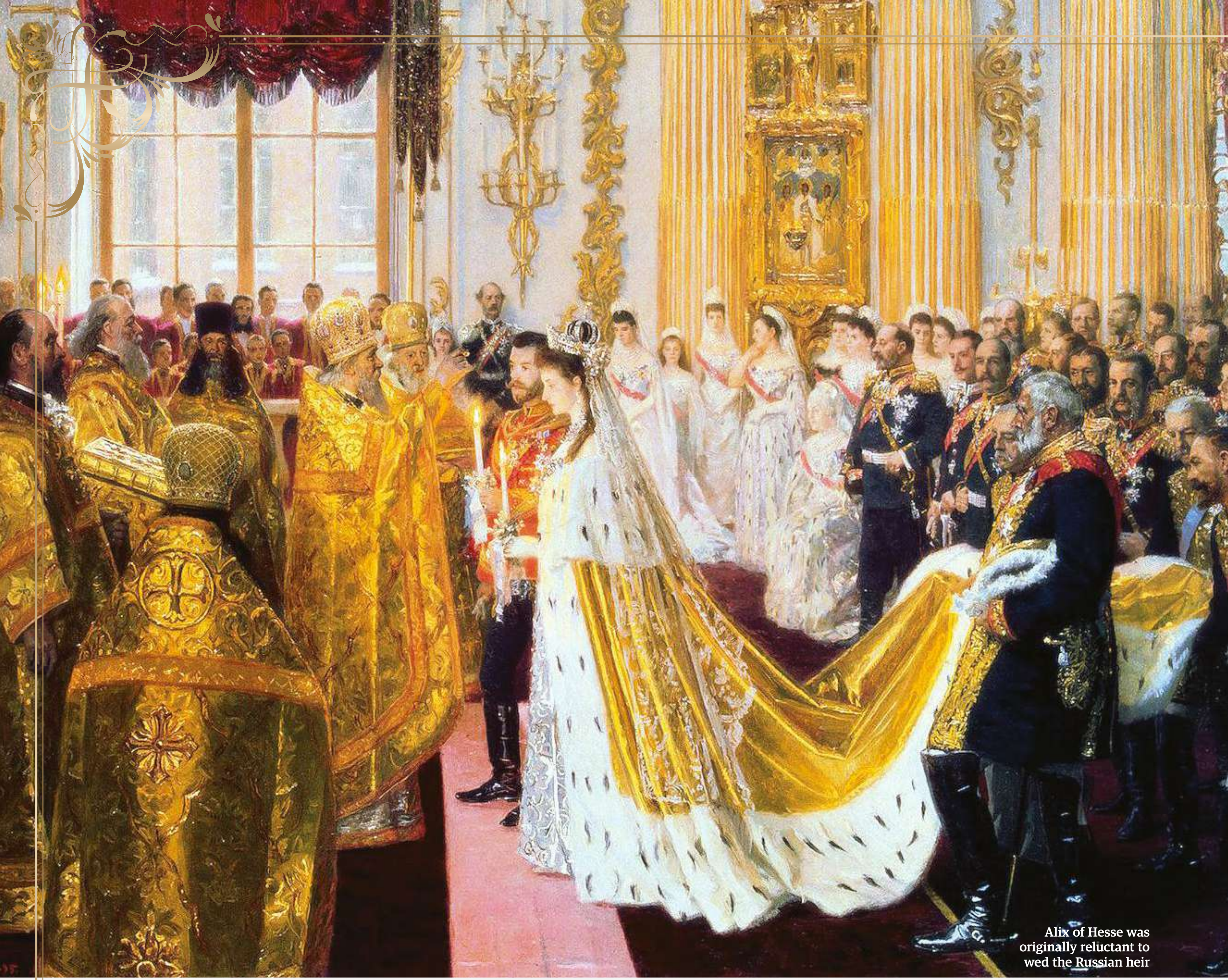
Finally in 1904, the tsar and his wife were overjoyed when she gave birth to a son, named Alexei. However, it took less than six weeks for the first symptoms of haemophilia to appear. Alexandra had known that there was a possibility her son would carry what had become known as 'the royal disease'. The illness, passed down among the descendants of her grandmother, Queen Victoria, was devastating for the empress. There was no medical treatment, and most haemophiliacs suffered terribly before their early deaths. Nicholas accepted his only son's condition with quiet resolve: it was simply another manifestation of "God's will," unseen divine forces that, as Russia's anointed autocratic monarch, he believed dictated absolutely everything in his life.

Alexandra, though, searched for miracles. In 1905, she found her miracle worker in the notorious Grigory Rasputin, a Siberian peasant whose prayers she believed were keeping her son alive. Within a few years, the uneducated peasant was openly meddling in politics and - to the dismay of the imperial couple's loyal supporters - rampaging through the capital in a seemingly endless orgy of drunken excess that did incredible damage to the prestige of the imperial throne.

Nicholas had never wanted to be tsar; with his quiet, gentle character, he disliked confrontation and easily gave in to demands from ambitious politicians and family members, setting his country on a disastrous course. War with Japan erupted in 1904, which was brought to an end a year later with Russia's humiliating defeat. Assassinations, pogroms and strikes swelled into a revolution in 1905 and when ultimately faced with open revolt, Nicholas was forced to grant his people a constitution and an elected parliament, the Duma, which effectively ended autocracy in Russia. Eventually, constantly



Towards the end of his reign, Nicholas became almost unrecognisable after the effects of his wife's control took their toll on him



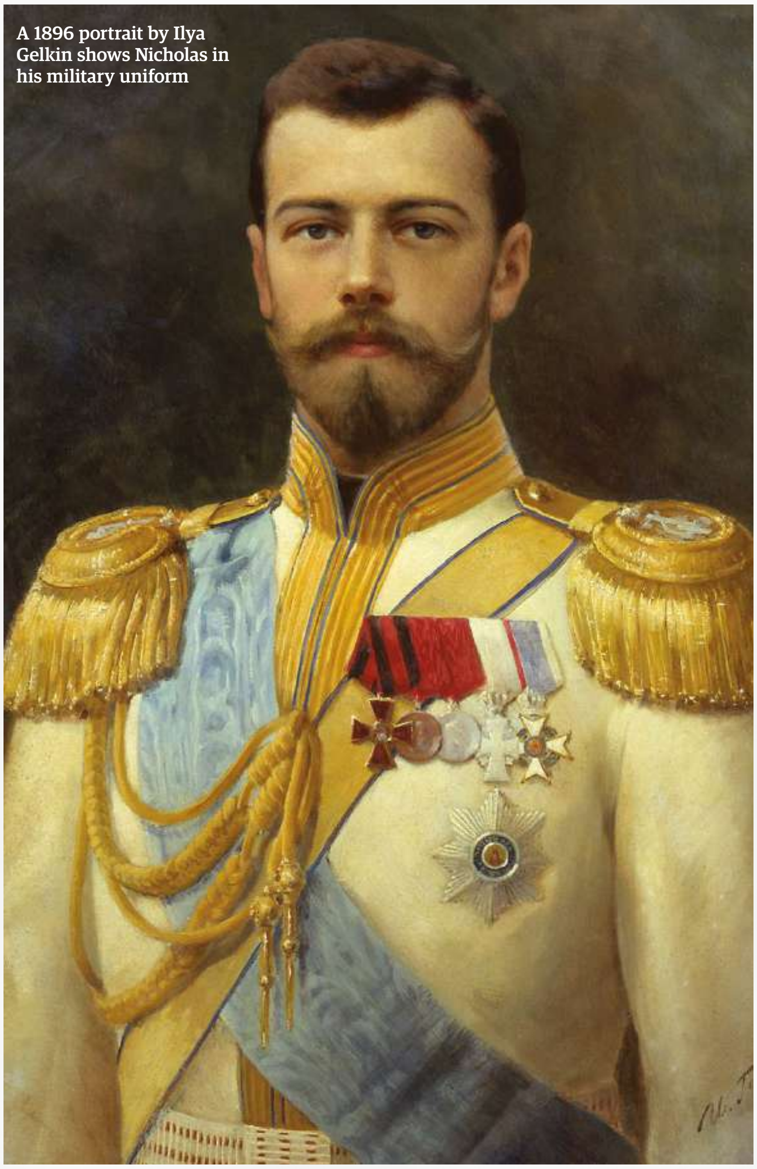
Alix of Hesse was originally reluctant to wed the Russian heir

worrying over Alexei's health, disillusion and continued unrest drove the imperial couple into seclusion and they all but disappeared, hiding behind the walls of their luxurious palaces, enjoying their happy family life together, but largely sacrificing the ceremonial duties that had once made the Russian court one of the most brilliant in the world.

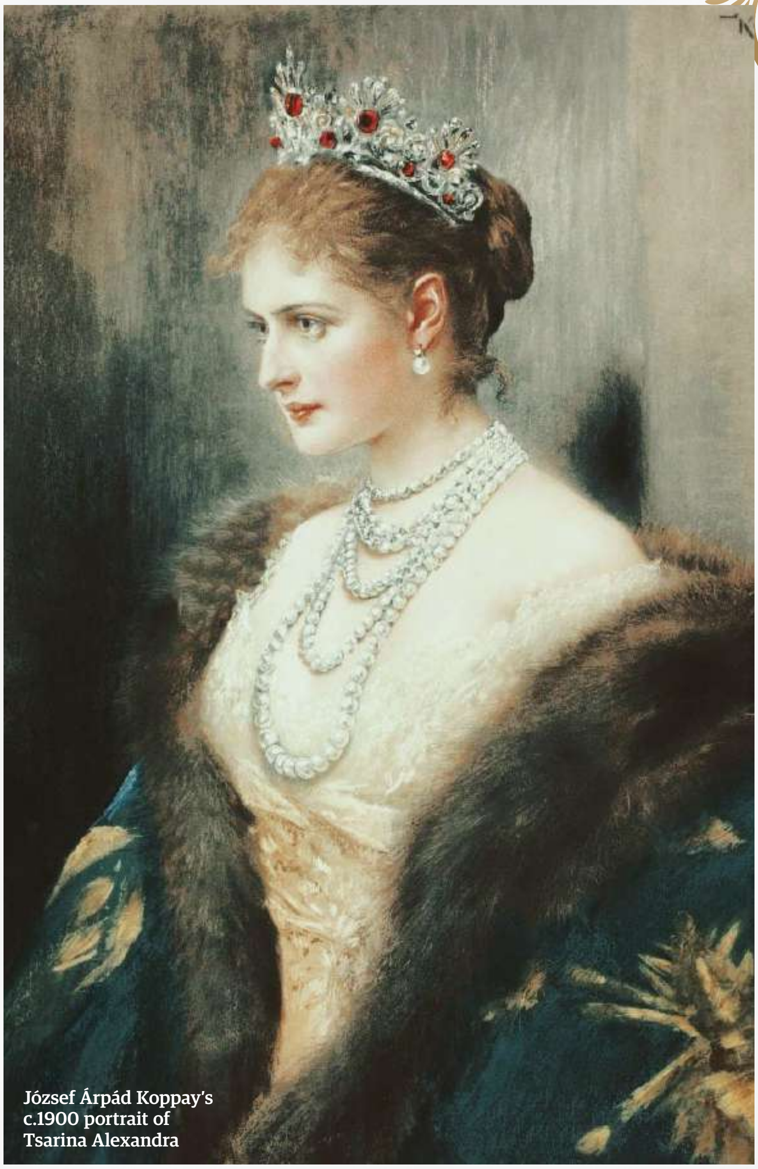
Much was forgiven when World War I erupted in August 1914, and millions of Russians marched off to join their British and French allies. The Empire had never seemed as united as it did the day Nicholas II declared war on Germany. Tens of thousands of his subjects had cheered his appearance at St Petersburg's Winter Palace and lustily sang the imperial anthem, *God Save The Tsar*. Nicholas patriotically changed the name of the imperial capital from the Germanic St Petersburg to the Slavic Petrograd and began spending weeks at Stavka, the Russian military headquarters some 800 miles away. Alexandra also joined the war effort together with her eldest daughters Olga and Tatiana. She trained as a Red Cross nurse and worked in a hospital for wounded officers, assisting in operations and tending to the soldiers. Their efforts were well intentioned, but many thought that, by changing bandages and amputating limbs, the empress of Russia was debasing her position.

An early Russian offensive in East Prussia quickly devolved into disastrous defeat, and it soon became apparent that the tsarist Empire was hopelessly short of adequate troop transport and munitions. At one point soldiers were even rationed to three bullets a day. In early 1915, Russian soldiers steadily advanced against the Austrians in Galicia but the gains were temporary. An offensive launched by the Central Powers in May drove tsarist soldiers back amid devastating casualties. By summer, nearly 1.4 million Russian soldiers had been killed or wounded, with nearly 1 million more taken as prisoners of war. In August, Warsaw fell to the advancing Germans. Russia was forced into retreat and its army was completely demoralised.

Alexandra used the crisis to campaign against her husband's cousin Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaievich, who led the army as supreme commander. The grand duke had made no secret of his distaste for Rasputin, which earned the empress's wrath. In letters to her husband she insisted that the grand duke was always plotting, attempting to promote himself and diminish the emperor's prestige. She urged her husband to remove the grand duke from power and assume supreme command himself. The grand duke, she repeatedly warned her husband, was "our friend's [Rasputin's] enemy, and that brings bad luck." Nicholas II needed little persuasion. He believed that his place was with his army. However symbolic, his presence at the front, he thought, would help to lift morale.



A 1896 portrait by Ilya Gelkin shows Nicholas in his military uniform



József Árpád Koppay's c.1900 portrait of Tsarina Alexandra

> "FOOD AND FUEL WERE SCARCE. LONG LINES OF THE TSAR'S SUBJECTS FILLED THE STREETS, STANDING IN FRIGID WEATHER HOPING FOR A BAG OF FLOUR OR HEATING OIL"

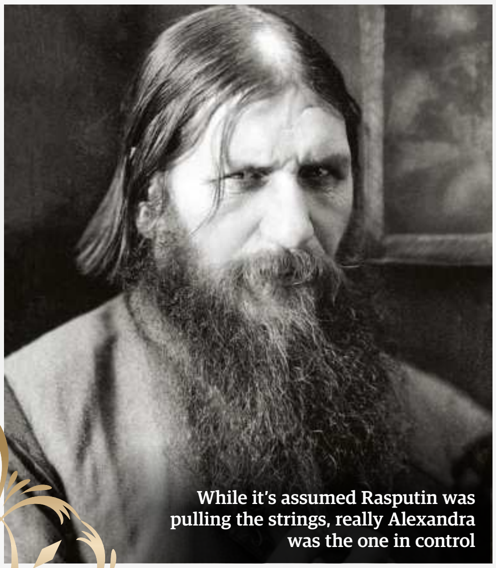
Nicholas had no practical experience in military tactics or leadership, and his decision to remove Nikolaievich from command horrified many. Ten of the thirteen members of the Council of Ministers submitted their resignations in protest, but an angry Nicholas simply dismissed their concerns. The emperor's mother, Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna, was in total despair. "This is not at all like Nicky!" she cried. "He is lovable, he is honest, he is good." Instead she put all of the blame at the feet of her daughter-in-law Alexandra, "It is all her work."

Nicholas left for Stavka to assume Supreme Command carrying a triumphant letter from his wife, who assured him that Rasputin had blessed the decision. "Our friend's prayers arise night and day for you to Heaven," she wrote to her husband, "and God will hear them. It is the beginning of the glory of your reign. Our friend said so and I absolutely believe it." In fact, it was the beginning of the end, but neither Nicholas nor Alexandra perceived the dangers that lay ahead.

With Nicholas at army headquarters, Alexandra soon became the face of imperial power. The emperor made governmental decisions but those decisions were often influenced and coerced by his wife. Alexandra assured Nicholas that she had "trousers on, unseen," and was ready to lead the government in his absence. Armed with undying earnestness and convinced of the superiority of her intellect, she plunged forward in an effort to be "useful."

Alexandra's understanding of her adopted homeland was abysmal. "Russia loves to feel the whip," she insisted to Nicholas, "it's in their nature." She would say

A 1913 group portrait of the tsar and his family



While it's assumed Rasputin was pulling the strings, really Alexandra was the one in control

that the country was fortunate to have "a real anointed sovereign". She never accepted the fact her husband had been forced to end the autocracy in 1905, and continually warned Nicholas that a constitutional government, with a ministry responsible to the people, not to the throne, would "be Russia's ruin". The tsar should "be more decided and self-confident" and "show your own mind". He should be "Peter the Great, Ivan the Terrible, Emperor Paul - crush them all under you!" Yet she protested whenever Nicholas voiced an opinion that was different than her own. She didn't want him to be more autocratic; she wanted him to be more obedient to her will. Nicholas, she candidly said, "is weak, but I am not".

The tsar had lived with such rebukes for two decades. Alexandra had never been shy in warning him of his perceived character deficiencies and prodding him to become the man she wished him to be. Though well meant, she actually undermined her husband's fragile self-esteem. By the last weeks of his reign, Nicholas had taken to repeatedly signing off his letters to his wife with, "Your weak-willed hubby". In attempting to reshape her husband according to her own desires, Alexandra made Nicholas entirely dependent on her and her opinions.

A deadly self-delusion soon took hold. Alexandra scattered Rasputin's name throughout her letters, but she was the dominant partner in their relationship. The hysterical empress in thrall to the Siberian peasant who dictated government appointments is a myth. Rasputin was crafty enough to sense what Alexandra wanted and simply parroted back her own views when quizzed on politicians and policies. She then used

ВѢЧНАЯ ПАМЯТЬ
ПОГИБШИМЪ
БОРЦАМЪ ЗА СВОБОДУ.

A mourning ceremony for victims of the February Revolution, Russia, 1917

THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

Russia quickly turned on its emperor after cold-blooded murder drove his soldiers to join the strikers and revolt

Disgust and desperation drove the Russian Revolution. A general strike brought angry workers opposing the war together with disillusioned students and the dispossessed on Petrograd's streets in February 1917. The first signs of trouble came when Cossacks, called out to break up the demonstrations, refused to turn their whips on the wretches waiting for food. By the end of the month, with the capital paralysed, Nicholas II ordered General Nicholas Khabalov, military commander of Petrograd to "end the disorders". The general's troops opened fire on the crowds, killing 169 people and injuring thousands. The peace, won by terror, is illusory. Soldiers, sickened by having shot the demonstrators, began to revolt, murdering their officers and declaring allegiance to the revolution. One by one, the elite Imperial Guards Regiments deserted as chaos swept the city. Mobs burned buildings and ransacked shops in search of food; across the capital, crowds attacked police and angrily tore down the double-headed eagle emblems of the Romanov dynasty. By 2 March, with government officials openly siding with the revolt, the Duma declared itself head of a Provisional Government. It took only nine days for the revolution to succeed.

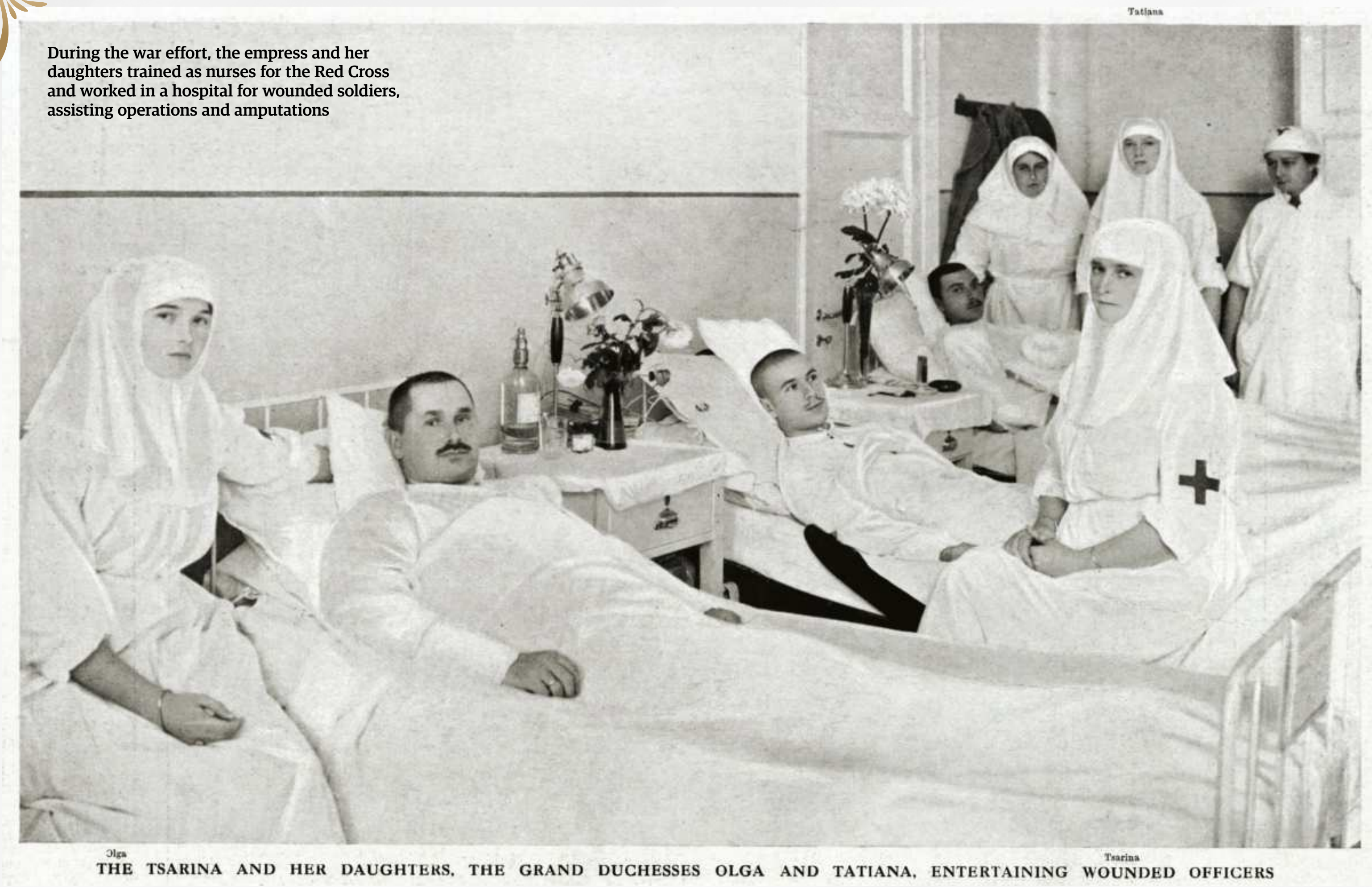
Rasputin's name to wrap her opinions in a mantle of divine sanction to her husband. It all meshed with emotional ideas that her marriage was some sort of religious mission, but in reality it was an abusive mixture of faith and politics. The tragedy is that Alexandra never realised what she was doing, and no-one was strong enough to stop her.

Officials came, went, and were reshuffled for no apparent reason in a shocking and disreputable display that left the country paralysed. In 18 months - from September 1915 to the Revolution - Russia had four prime ministers, five ministers of the interior, four ministers of agriculture, four ministers of religion, three ministers of war, and three foreign ministers. Nicholas seemed unable to resist his wife's suggestions, which were often little short of demands, even when he knew her proposals would have catastrophic consequences.

Such was the case with Alexander Protopopov, who became minister of the interior in September 1916. Protopopov mumbled to himself, twitched and shouted obscenities at the voices in his head. Suffering from syphilis and slowly going insane, he had already been confined to asylums but nevertheless, Alexandra wanted him appointed to the second highest office in the land. When Nicholas resisted, she used Rasputin's name: "He likes our friend for four years, and that says much about a man," she wrote to Nicholas, yet the tsar was uncertain. "Our friend's ideas about men are sometimes queer," he warned. "All these changes exhaust the head. They happen much too often". Alexandra refused to back down and Nicholas gave in against his better judgment.

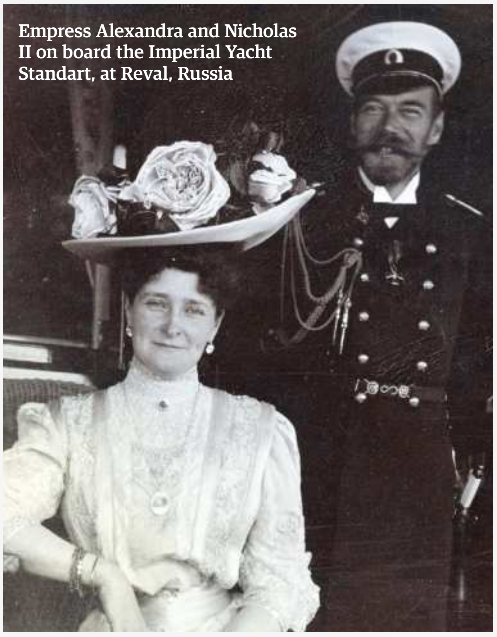
Accusations of treason fell across the Russian capital like the first flakes of snow blanketing

> "ACCUSATIONS OF TREASON FELL ACROSS THE RUSSIAN CAPITAL LIKE THE FIRST FLAKES OF SNOW BLANKETING PETROGRAD"


Tatiana
Olga
Tsarina
THE TSARINA AND HER DAUGHTERS, THE GRAND DUCHESSES OLGA AND TATIANA, ENTERTAINING WOUNDED OFFICERS

During the war effort, the empress and her daughters trained as nurses for the Red Cross and worked in a hospital for wounded soldiers, assisting operations and amputations

> "THE EMPRESS, IT WAS SAID, BELIEVED HERSELF TO BE A SECOND CATHERINE THE GREAT AND, LIKE HER, PLANNED TO KILL HER HUSBAND AND SEIZE HIS THRONE"



Empress Alexandra and Nicholas II on board the Imperial Yacht Standart, at Reval, Russia

Petrograd in the autumn of 1916. The country was spiralling into chaos. Discontent in the army, the endless succession of ministerial appointments, moral disintegration among the Orthodox hierarchy, and the shadow of Rasputin all coalesced into a growing hatred against the Romanov dynasty in general, and Nicholas - especially Alexandra - in particular. Watching the latest newsreels of the imperial couple in a cinema, one British visitor was shocked when the audience erupted in hisses when the empress appeared on screen.

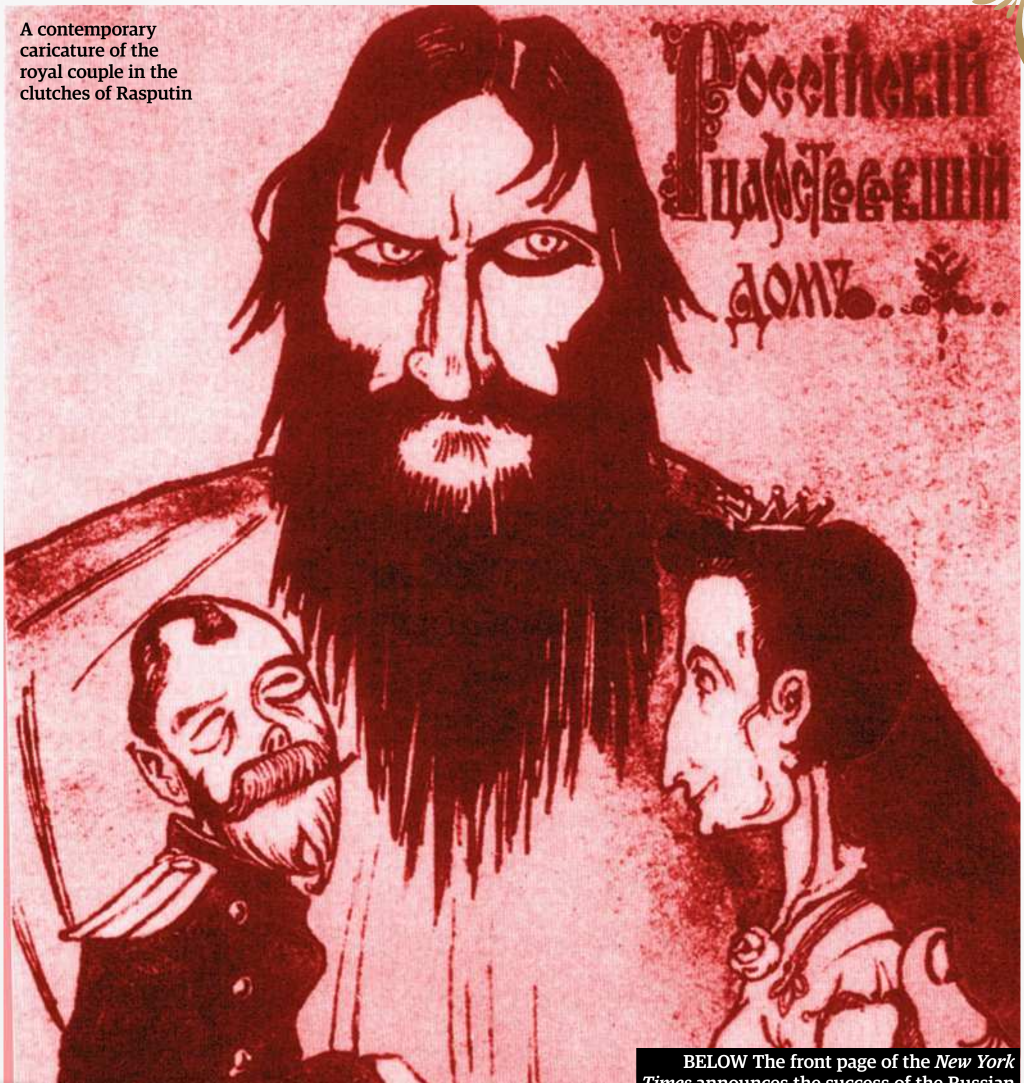
No rumour was too bizarre. Before her marriage, Alexandra had been a German princess and so many Russians openly questioned her loyalties and spread tales that she was secretly working to negotiate a separate peace with her cousin, Kaiser Wilhelm II. The empress, it was said, believed herself to be a second Catherine the Great - another German princess come to Russia - and, like her, planned to kill her husband and seize his throne for herself. Obscene pamphlets and cartoons showed the empress and Rasputin; people believed that he slept with Alexandra and her four young daughters. "Rasputin, Rasputin, Rasputin - it was like a refrain," recalled Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna. "The word 'revolution' was everywhere."

Relatives warned of the impending crisis but to no avail. Three grand dukes went to Nicholas that autumn, imploring him to grant a responsible ministry. But such an idea was beyond Nicholas's comprehension: "I'd have to forget everything in my life," he once said on hearing such a proposal. "I cannot make a decision that goes against my own conscience. If I did so, I would be unable to believe that I was responsible before God." The tsar was equally unreceptive to those who begged him to ignore the empress's advice. "I believe no one but my wife!" was his cold response. When Alexandra's sister Elisabeth visited the empress in December, she warned that Rasputin was destroying the dynasty. "Remember the fate of Louis XVI!" the grand duchess cried. But the Empress arose and told her to leave. "She drove me away like a dog," Elisabeth later wept.

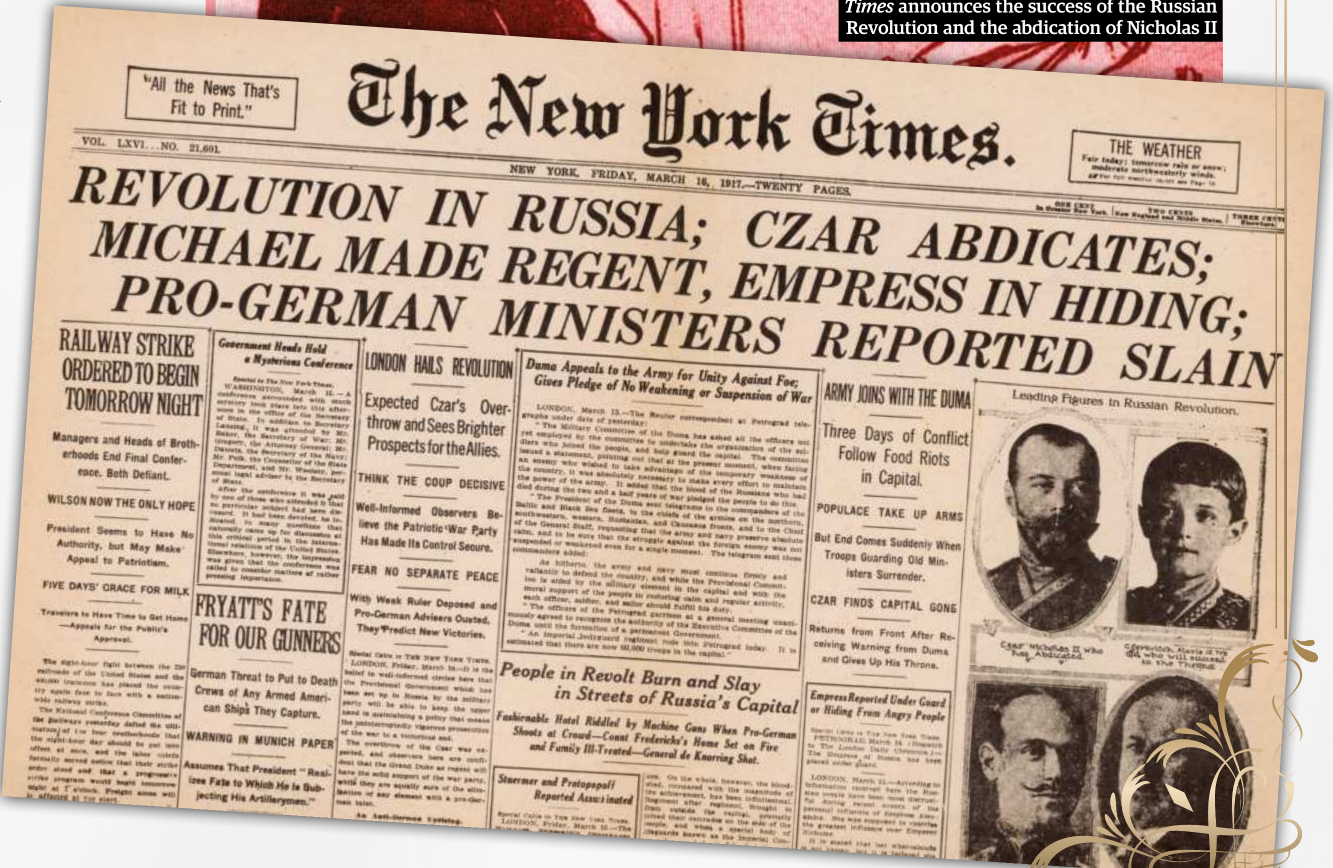
On the morning of 17 December 1916, the telephone beside Alexandra's chaise in her famous Mauve Boudoir jingled to life. The empress was stunned, Rasputin was missing. "Our friend has disappeared!" she wrote to her husband at headquarters. The previous evening, Rasputin had gone out with Prince Felix Yusupov, one of Russia's wealthiest aristocrats and husband of Nicholas II's only Russian niece. The prince denied that he had anything to do with the man's disappearance but before long the story unravelled in all its grisly, theatrical detail. After having been poisoned, shot and stabbed, Rasputin had been hurled into a frozen river. His death came too late to make any difference, but it did have one unfortunate and unsuspected effect: it divided the imperial couple from their censorious relatives and drove them further into suspicious isolation.

Officials who met Nicholas in the weeks after the murder found the tsar unrecognisable. His cheeks were hollow, his eyes were listless and he was unable to answer even the simplest of questions that were put to him. For 22 years he had been assailed from all sides with advice, warnings and orders that had left him close to a nervous breakdown, while doses of cocaine, hashish and opium for toothaches and stomach pains increasingly left the tsar in a mental haze. "He is no longer seriously interested in anything," complained one courtier. "He has become quite apathetic. He goes through his daily routine like an automaton." The French ambassador left his last meeting convinced that the tsar "has lost faith in his mission, and that he has abdicated inwardly and is now resigned to disaster."

People whispered of conspiracy. It was said that guards units would soon arrest Alexandra, depose Nicholas and declare the young Alexei as the new tsar of Russia. Members of the government pondered seizing the tsar's train and forcing him to abdicate in favour of his son. When



A contemporary caricature of the royal couple in the clutches of Rasputin



BELOW The front page of the *New York Times* announces the success of the Russian Revolution and the abdication of Nicholas II

"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

THE WEATHER

VOL. LXVI...NO. 21,601.

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, MARCH 16, 1917.—TWENTY PAGES.

REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA; CZAR ABDICATES; MICHAEL MADE REGENT, EMPRESS IN HIDING; PRO-GERMAN MINISTERS REPORTED SLAIN

RAILWAY STRIKE ORDERED TO BEGIN TOMORROW NIGHT

Managers and Heads of Brotherhoods End Final Conference, Both Defiant.

WILSON NOW THE ONLY HOPE

President Seems to Have No Authority, but May Make Appeal to Patriotism.

FIVE DAYS' GRACE FOR MILK

Travelers to Have Time to Get Home —Appeals for the Public's Approval.

Government Heads Hold a Mysterious Conference

FRYATT'S FATE FOR OUR GUNNERS

German Threat to Put to Death Crews of Any Armed American Ships They Capture.

WARNING IN MUNICH PAPER

Assumes That President "Realizes Fate to Which He is Subjecting His Artillerymen."

LONDON HAILS REVOLUTION

Expected Czar's Overthrow and Sees Brighter Prospects for the Allies.

THINK THE COUP DECISIVE

Well-Informed Observers Believe the Patriotic War Party Has Made Its Control Secure.

FEAR NO SEPARATE PEACE

With Weak Ruler Deposed and Pro-German Advisers Ousted, They Predict New Victories.

An Anti-German Uprising.

Duma Appeals to the Army for Unity Against Foe; Gives Pledge of No Weakening or Suspension of War

People in Revolt Burn and Slay in Streets of Russia's Capital

Fashionable Hotel Riddled by Machine Guns When Pro-German Shoots at Crowd—Count Fredericks's Home Set on Fire and Family Ill-Treated—General de Knorring Shot.

Stuermer and Protopopoff Reported Assassinated

ARMY JOINS WITH THE DUMA

Three Days of Conflict Follow Food Riots in Capital.

POPULACE TAKE UP ARMS

But End Comes Suddenly When Troops Guarding Old Ministers Surrender.

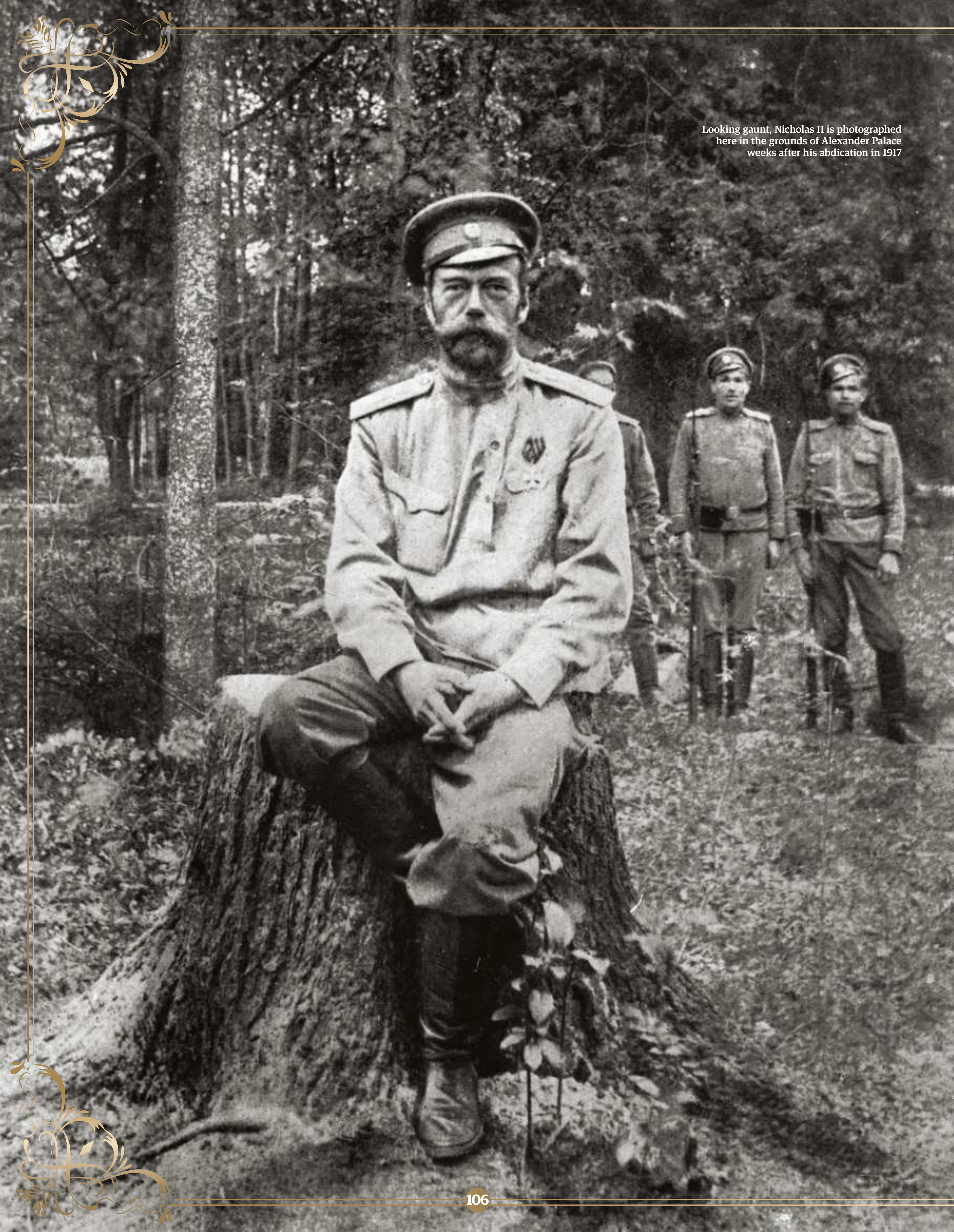
CZAR FINDS CAPITAL GONE

Returns from Front After Receiving Warning from Duma and Gives Up His Throne.

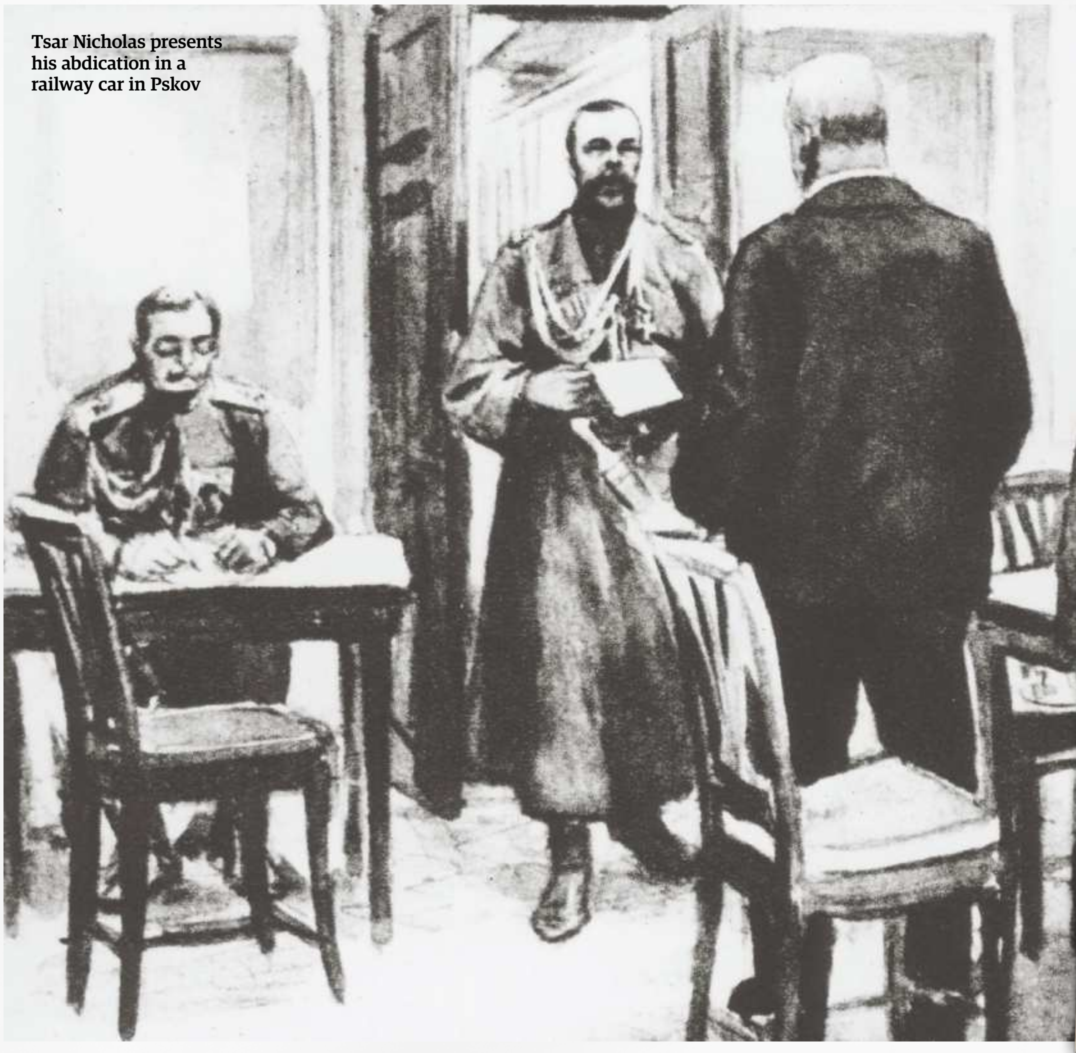
Empress Reported Under Guard or Hiding From Angry People

Leading Figures in Russian Revolution.

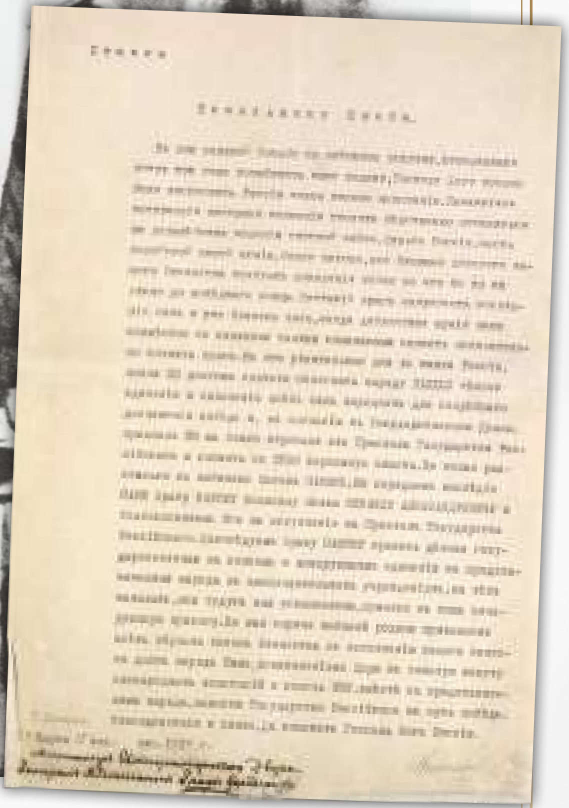
Czar Nicholas II who has Abdicated.



Looking gaunt, Nicholas II is photographed here in the grounds of Alexander Palace weeks after his abdication in 1917



Tsar Nicholas presents his abdication in a railway car in Pskov



Nicholas II's signed Act of Abdication from March 1917. The document was part of the '1917 Romanov & Revolution' exhibition at the Hermitage Amsterdam, which ran until 17 September 2017

NICHOLAS II'S ABDICATION

After losing the support of his generals, Tsar Nicholas II abdicated in favour of the wrong person, ultimately bringing to an end the 304-year-reign of his family's imperial dynasty

Nicholas II had lived through strikes and demonstrations before; viewing them as treasonous, he had managed to somehow ride out the difficulties, and he had expected to do so again in 1917. Isolated at military headquarters, he had only intermittent and conflicting news of the disorders in Petrograd. In early 1917 a telegram from Michael Rodzianko, president of the Duma, warned of "anarchy in the capital," but a letter from Alexandra assured her husband that "everyone remains devoted to you". Nicholas decided that the president was exaggerating, saying, "That fat Rodzianko has sent me more nonsense to which I shall not bother to reply." But by the next day, when Rodzianko, the State Council and Alexandra all warned that the situation was serious, Nicholas decided to return to his capital. His train took a circuitous route north and, hoping to avoid rebels, was diverted to the town of Pskov. Here, on the afternoon of 2 March, he learned that the new Provisional Government, as well as the army high command, was demanding his abdication. Having lost the support of his generals, not wanting to impede the war effort, and unwilling to launch his country into a civil war, the tsar - tired, disillusioned and mentally exhausted - agreed to renounce the throne. Initially he abdicated in favour of his 12-year-old son Alexei, but he changed his mind after considering the haemophiliac boy's fragile condition. Instead he abdicated in favour of his brother Grand Duke Michael. This was illegal - not even the tsar had the right to renounce the succession rights of his heir - but no one challenged him. At 11.40pm that night, Nicholas signed an abdication manifesto that ended with the words, "May the Lord God save Russia." In his diary, he recorded bitterly: "All around me I see treachery, cowardice and deceit." The next day, when Grand Duke Michael refused to accept the throne under such dangerous circumstances, the 304-year-old Romanov dynasty came to an end.

Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna begged her son to send Alexandra away so she could no longer interfere with political affairs, Nicholas abruptly dismissed her and she subsequently fled to Kiev. Grand dukes sat in cafés, openly declaring that to save the dynasty from ruin, the tsar would have to be sacrificed.

On 23 February, Nicholas left his capital to return to headquarters. Food and fuel were scarce. Long lines of the Tsar's desperate subjects filled the streets of Petrograd, standing in frigid weather hoping to collect a bag of flour or a container of heating oil. Nearly 100,000 striking factory workers soon joined them, shouting, "Down with the war! Down with the autocracy!" Over the next week, discontent swelled into revolution. By the time Nicholas returned to his palace, it was as a prisoner, unknowingly having doomed himself and his family to a bloody end in a Siberian cellar at the hands of the Bolsheviks just over a year later.

© Alamy, Getty Images, GARF/State Archive of the Russian Federation

RASPUTIN

INSIDE THE MIND OF THE MAD MONK

Find out how the mystic gained the trust of the Russian royal family, only for his life to end under the most brutal circumstances

Words **Frances White**

For a great deal of time in Russia it was believed that the name Rasputin meant 'licentious', and it was this image of the man that became the most prevalent. Rasputin was an accused sexual deviant, a rapist, and 'Mad Monk' who played the Russian royals like keys on a piano and whispered dark urges into the tsarina's ear. Rasputin, however, does not mean licentious at all. Its meaning is closer to, 'Where two rivers meet', referring to the place where he was born.

Just like his name, the true Rasputin, the man who lived and breathed, has been lost to history and replaced with caricatures; an old man with a long scraggly beard, terrible teeth and even more terrible deeds - but also a doting father, a respected holy man and a lover of beauty. It is this duality that has confounded and caused debates to this day. Was he indeed the man who brought a Russian dynasty to its knees, or has history created a scapegoat out of a man who only ever acted with good intentions?

The village of Pokrovskoye was small even by Siberian standards. With only 200 dwellings and no more than a thousand residents, it was an incredibly isolated start for the man whom every citizen of Russia would come to know, fear and loathe. But it was in this quiet, sleepy peasant village that Grigory Rasputin was born. The fifth of nine children, from a very early age Rasputin did not fit in. He did not attend school, for there was no school for him to attend, and he soon fell into a life of debauchery and drunkenness. He found the backbreaking labour of peasant work boring and empty, and he stole horses, fences - anything to add colour to his dull existence.

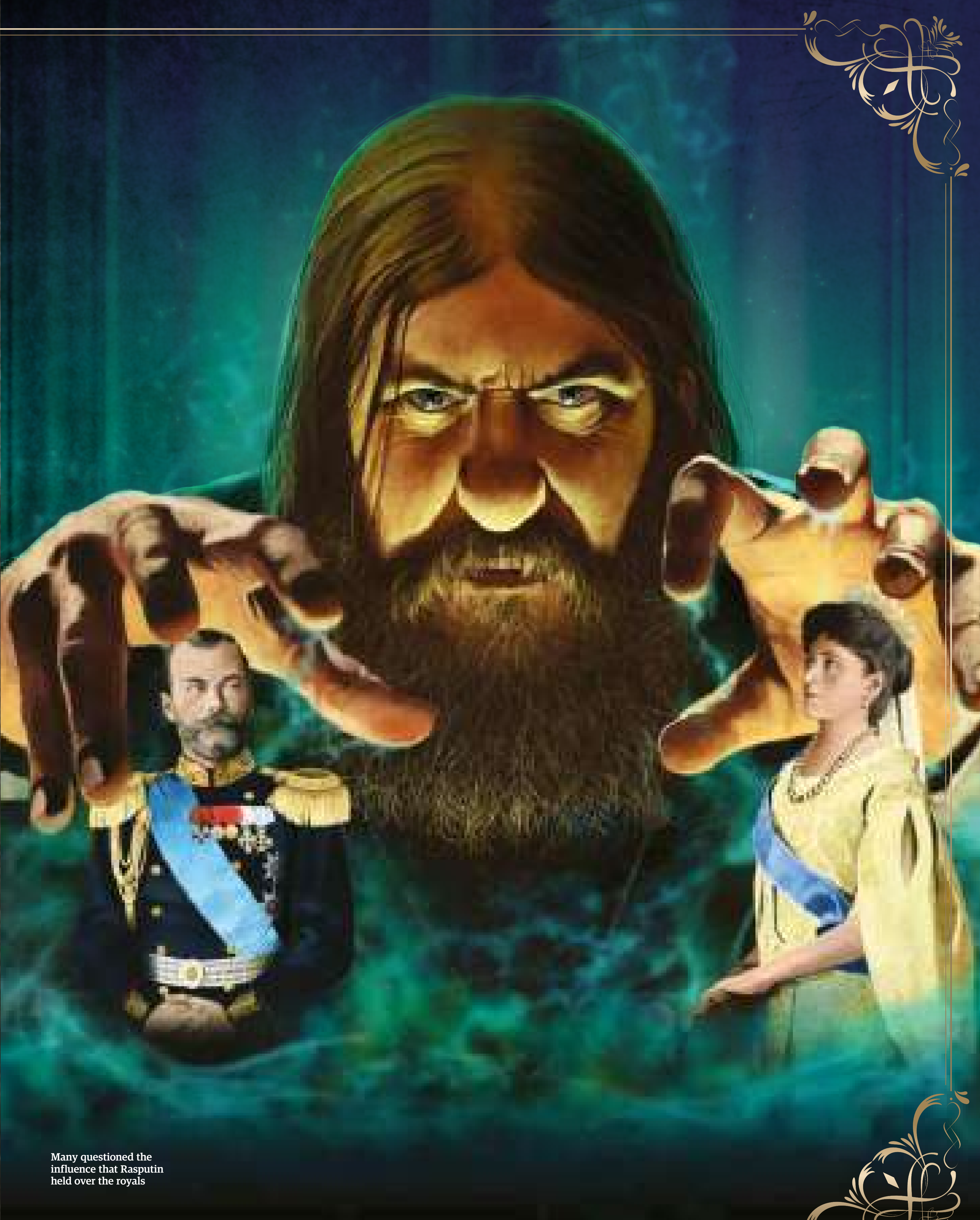
Rasputin was not a fool; he did not live a life of crime due to incompetence, but instead because of a feeling that his life was lacking something. He had a wife, he even had children, but he still felt a gaping emptiness. Now in his twenties, he found himself, either through divine providence or banishment, at the newly expanded Verkhoturye Monastery. It was there that he met Starets Makary, an elder who lived a humble existence in the woods near the monastery. Rasputin's interactions with this holy man slowly transformed the rebel youth into a deeply spiritual individual. Rasputin gave up alcohol, tobacco and meat. When he returned to Pokrovskoye the rebellious criminal had become a fervent religious convert.

Rasputin had been inspired by Makary but not by the monastery. Throughout his whole life, Rasputin had never been one to sit idly, and he was definitely not accustomed to bowing to authority and blindly following orders, so it is not surprising he was repulsed by a life of servitude in a cold stone building. Rasputin did not belong in small places, or behind locked doors. His ever-wandering heart wished to explore the vastness of the Earth, and that's exactly what he set about doing.

Rasputin packed few belongings, wished his family goodbye and began the life of a strannik, or mystic wanderer. We do not know the extent or length of Rasputin's various pilgrimages in this stage of his life, but it is possible that he travelled as far as Mount Athos, the centre of the Orthodox Church. Sometimes he did not come back home for years, and his own wife and children struggled to recognise the man that returned. However, even in this life of a strannik Rasputin began to carve his own path.

During these years of wandering Rasputin encountered many different kinds of people from all branches of the Russian social order. Many have commented in memoirs and elsewhere that what Rasputin possessed was a very unique magnetism. He had a talent for understanding people quickly, he knew exactly what to say to them and he was unlike any priest or holy man they had encountered. This is because it was the truth - Rasputin was different, he had not confined himself to books and monasteries, but to the real world, and real people. When he spoke about God it was with a meaning that normal people could understand and his own beliefs were strengthened not simply with study, but with vivid, electric and very real experiences.

This 'magnetism' began to draw people to Rasputin's home. Villagers and pilgrims further afield travelled to sit, talk, pray and seek council from the man. He soon amassed a loyal group of followers. However, Rasputin also attracted negative attention. Rumours quickly spread that he was often seen with young women, that his followers would bathe him, and that he was teaching them mysterious rituals.



Many questioned the influence that Rasputin held over the royals

FAITH OR FAKE?

Alexandra believed Rasputin cured her son with faith-healing, but it's one of many explanations

The wrong drugs

Aspirin was in use at the time and it is likely it was administered to the heir to help reduce his pain. Rasputin may have rejected the use of this drug, and by doing so unintentionally helped the boy, as aspirin thins the blood and would have worsened Alexei's condition.

Calming presence

As a holy man it is not out of the question to assume that Rasputin brought a calm, tranquil air to both Alexandra and her son. This reduced stress may have helped the bleeding to gradually slow and stop.

Drugging

A popular theory at the time was that Rasputin was drugging Alexei with Tibetan herbs. This theory was fuelled by the disconnect people felt towards the imperial family.

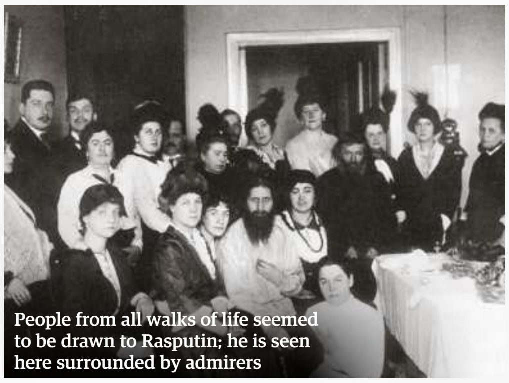
Good timing

Others believed Rasputin to be less occult and more cunning. It was argued that he had a confidant at the court, a lady-in-waiting, who fed him information about Alexei, and when the boy was on the mend the healer made an appearance to claim the credit.

Hypnosis

The court physician at the time, Botkin, fiercely disliked Rasputin and claimed he had used hypnosis on the child, whispering words into his ear and inducing the bleeding to stop.

A post-mortem photograph of Rasputin - a bullet wound can clearly be seen in his forehead



People from all walks of life seemed to be drawn to Rasputin; he is seen here surrounded by admirers

Rasputin was especially despised by the resident priest of Pokrovskoye, who likely didn't relish the idea of an upstart peasant gaining such popularity over himself and his own teachings. Due to all this attention, Rasputin's meetings were abandoned and the priest probably thought that was the end of it.

When Rasputin announced his intentions to travel to St Petersburg, he was warned by a fellow holy man that "the city will ruin you", but he ignored the warning; he had set his heart on a single mission, and nobody could dissuade him. He bore a letter of recommendation that granted him access to Bishop Sergei, the rector of the St Petersburg Seminary. Through association with Sergei, Rasputin became known to the curious elite of St Petersburg and the counts and countesses were fascinated by the bedraggled travelling man with his soft, strong words and strange allure.

Soon the aristocracy were introducing him to their friends and the name Rasputin became known to anyone who was anyone in the capital. After befriending Princess Milica of Montenegro and her sister, Rasputin was then introduced by them to the two most powerful figures in the whole of Russia - the tsar and the tsarina.

> "THE OUTSIDER WAS A CURIOSITY… AND ALMOST A PARTY PIECE"

Rasputin's arrival to the lives of the imperial family could not have been better timed if he had planned it himself. Russia was in a state of disarray; the imperial family were facing a brutal backlash and there was a very real chance of them losing their grip on the country entirely. Rasputin sat and listened to Alexandra's worries and they spoke at length about religion. The holy man calmly told her that her husband needed to be closer to his people, and that she could trust his words. Alexandra immediately became close to Rasputin, as she too had a strong belief in the strength of the dynasty, and believed that he had been sent by God to secure the strength of their royal line.

Alexandra's trust in Rasputin meant that when her son, Alexei, suffered from one of his haemophilic bleeding episodes, she summoned him immediately. Alexandra was well aware of the seriousness of his condition; she had lost an uncle and brother to the same hereditary disease, and it is likely she knew that it would claim her son, too. Alexei became a symbol of the future of Russian royalty - to save him was also to save tsardom. Alexandra had spoken to many doctors and tried multiple cures for her son's disease but nothing had worked, and so in her moment of need, with her child dangerously close to death, she called upon the mystic holy man.

Rasputin came to the palace, began to pray by the boy's bed and amazingly, seemed to be able to calm the child, his condition rapidly improving. In another incident Alexei sustained an injury and lay suffering and moaning for days. Alexandra, remembering how Rasputin had managed to ease her child previously, sent a telegram to the man. Rasputin responded to her worries: "The little one will not die. Do not allow the doctors to bother him too much." Just as he said, the boy's health went on to improve and Alexandra was convinced Rasputin was responsible for his recovery.

Although Rasputin's role was primarily as a healer to Alexei, he became a close confidant of the family, even occasionally serving as adviser to the tsar himself. However, Rasputin's easy access and apparent influence over the household did not go unnoticed. Living in an apartment on Gorokhovaya street, Rasputin was frequently visited by peasants seeking assistance, but even more so by the aristocracy, many of whom planned to use him to gain their own favour at court.

There were others, however, who were less than fond of the strange peasant. Rumours concerning Rasputin began to resurge. Some of Rasputin's enemies went to Nicholas and Alexandra directly to warn them of his influence, but both were quick to dismiss them. When Nicholas was urged to exile him to Tobolsk he commented, "I know Rasputin too well to believe all the tittle-tattle about him." One of the most damning accusations against Rasputin was that he was a member of the Khlysty, an underground sect split off from the Orthodox Church. The fact that he was a good dancer, and the sect was known for their dances and possible sexual promiscuity, seemed to add fuel to the accusation. Many different figures in the Orthodox Church leapt on this, accusing Rasputin of numerous immoral practises.

Against such a torrent of abuse, Nicholas had no choice but to investigate the holy man. However, after two months with nothing uncovered, the investigation ended. Anyone who criticised Rasputin was condemned by a royal family pushed to the brink. Politicians who spoke out against him found themselves relieved of their positions, and more willing, obedient men were put in their place.

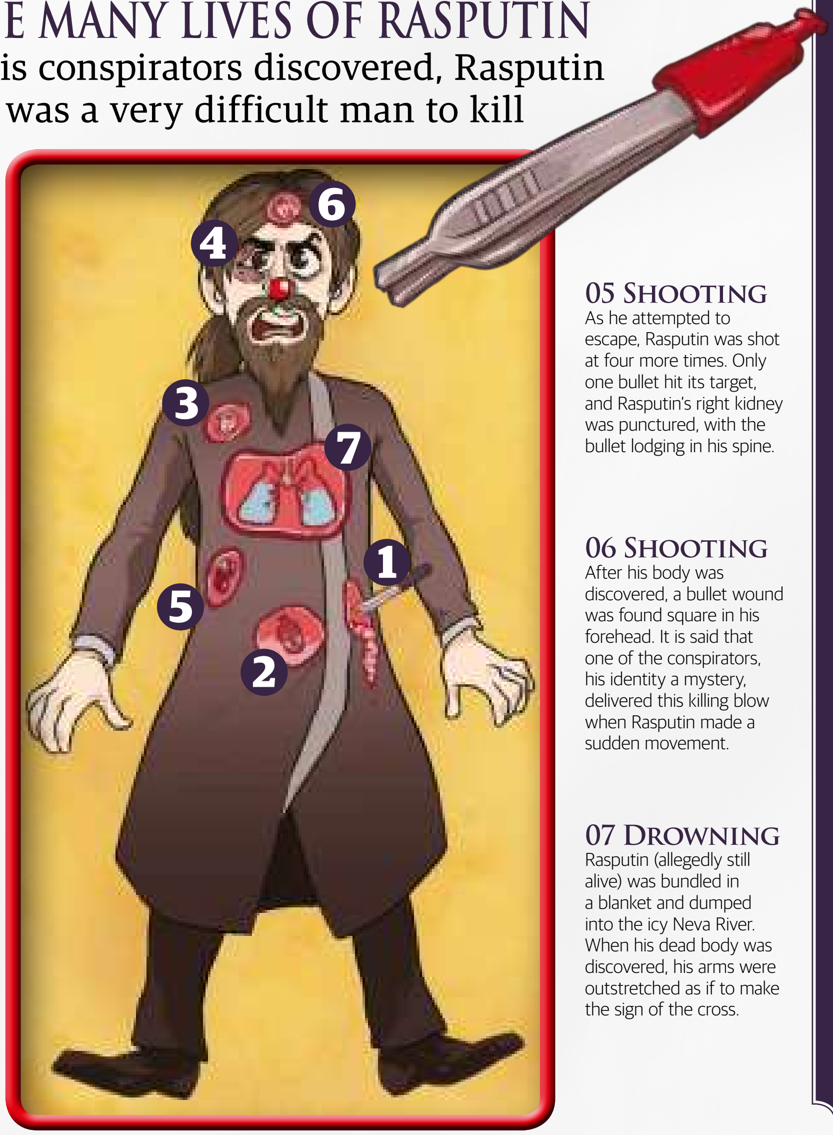
If Nicholas wasn't willing to condemn Rasputin with the rest of them, then the two of them would burn together. By associating and supporting a man who was regarded by many as an evil force, Nicholas did little to bolster his own reputation.

Rasputin's entire demeanour was said to have changed immensely after an assassination attempt in 1914, and it's possible that the experience made him a little warier of trusting people. Whether he thought he was doing the right thing or not, Rasputin had made some very dangerous enemies. With the tsarina refusing to acknowledge that he was a bad influence, the nobles decided to take matters into their own hands. A group of conspirators tricked Rasputin into meeting with them under the pretence of meeting the tsar's niece. Rasputin entered the Yusupov Palace on the night of 17 December 1916 and was not seen alive again. His disappearance was noted immediately the next morning, and a search began. His body was finally discovered, frozen solid beside the riverbank of the Malaya Nevka River.

When the conspirators planned Rasputin's murder, their goal was likely to eliminate the powerful influence over the monarchy. However, the monarchy could not be saved, not even by destroying Rasputin. Russia was already hurtling off the cliff by the time he was murdered, and it was far too late to save it. In December 1916, Rasputin wrote a letter to the tsar about a peculiar prophecy, that if he was killed by the tsar's relations then "none of your children will remain alive for more than two years." He also predicted the tsar's death, and the coming of the antichrist, to plummet the country into plague and poverty. He also claimed that "the Russian land will die."

THE MANY LIVES OF RASPUTIN

As his conspirators discovered, Rasputin was a very difficult man to kill



01 STABBING

A former prostitute stabbed Rasputin in the gut so violently that his entrails fell from his stomach. She also screamed, "I've killed the antichrist!" However, he survived after surgery.

02 POISON

Fuelled by the country's hate, a group of conspirators lured Rasputin to their home and encouraged him to dine on wine and cyanide-laced cakes. Despite consuming enough poison to kill several men, he was nevertheless unaffected.

03 SHOOTING

After Rasputin failed to be affected by the poison, one of the conspirators rushed upstairs then returned with a revolver. Rasputin was shot through the chest. The bullet went clean through his body, but he still wasn't dead.

04 BEATING

After falling to the floor having been shot, Rasputin tried to escape through the yard. The conspirators chased after him and beat him with a rubber club when they caught up.

05 SHOOTING

As he attempted to escape, Rasputin was shot at four more times. Only one bullet hit its target, and Rasputin's right kidney was punctured, with the bullet lodging in his spine.

06 SHOOTING

After his body was discovered, a bullet wound was found square in his forehead. It is said that one of the conspirators, his identity a mystery, delivered this killing blow when Rasputin made a sudden movement.

07 DROWNING

Rasputin (allegedly still alive) was bundled in a blanket and dumped into the icy Neva River. When his dead body was discovered, his arms were outstretched as if to make the sign of the cross.

THE MEN WHO KILLED RASPUTIN

Pushed to the edge of desperation, these men formed a conspiracy to end Rasputin

Felix Yusupov

Coming from an extremely wealthy family - richer than the Romanovs - Felix was the oldest surviving male heir to the huge fortune. Although he was clever and quick-witted, he faced criticism for avoiding service during World War I. As the husband of Alexander Romanov's niece, Princess Irina of Russia, he disliked the influence that Rasputin held over the family, and became a key player in the plot to bring about his downfall.

Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich

Dmitri was grandson of Alexander II of Russia and after his primary carer, his uncle, was killed by a revolutionary attack, he went to live with the Romanovs. He was known to be something of a playboy and these actions likely ruined plans for him to marry the eldest Romanov daughter, Olga. In his later life he moved to Paris and had an affair with Coco Chanel.

Vladimir Mitrofanovich Purishkevich

Born in Bessarabia, a region in Eastern Europe, Purishkevich followed his strong right-wing leanings and founded the Union of Russian People, a counter-revolutionary group. He was then elected to the Russian Duma, but he was a disruptive presence. Behind the scenes he was working on a plan to rid the country of Rasputin's influence for good.

Stanislaus de Lazovert

Originally born in Poland, Lazovert moved to Russia and crossed paths with Purishkevich during World War I. Trained as a doctor, it was Lazovert who was given the task of lacing the cakes with poison – potassium cyanide to be exact. Claiming to have used a dose large enough to kill several men, Rasputin somehow survived. It has since been argued that Lazovert's will failed him and he in fact couldn't poison the cakes.

Sergei Mikhailovich Sukhotin

A lieutenant in the Preobrazhensky Regiment, one of the oldest elite regiments of the Imperial Russian Army, it is believed that Sukhotin was an old friend of Felix's but was injured near the beginning of the war. Little is known about Sukhotin beyond this, but it is likely he had some familiarity with the men to become embroiled in the plot.

MURDER IN THE HOUSE OF ROMANOV

Shot and stabbed by drunken revolutionaries, the murder of the Russian royal family still reverberates today

Words **Will Lawrence**

When they awoke on the morning of Tuesday 16 July 1918, it was just another day in captivity for the Romanovs. The former tsar of Russia, Nicholas Alexandrovich Romanov, his wife Alexandra and their five children had spent the last 16 months in captivity, Nicholas having abdicated in March 1917, bringing to an end over 300 years of Romanov rule over the Russian empire.

To begin with, the family was held under arrest at Tsarskoe Selo, enjoying a life of relative luxury. Some say that Nicholas, never a confident or comfortable ruler, had never been happier, revelling in the trappings of rule without the responsibilities. In late April 1918, however, the family were transferred to the bleak Urals and settled in the town of Ekaterinburg.

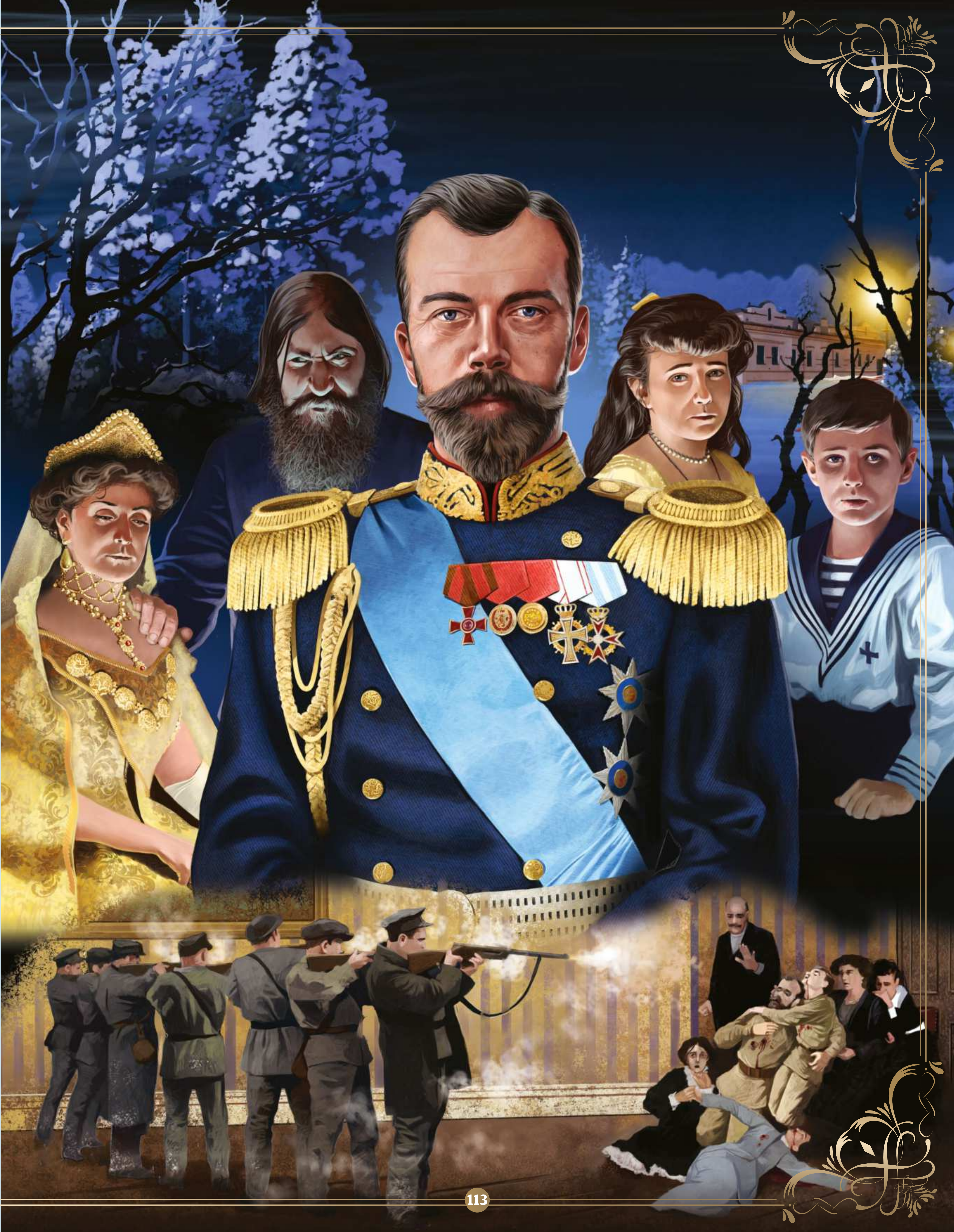
Here, at Ipatiev House, their lives became monotonous, their Bolshevik captors depriving them of the luxuries to which they were accustomed and treating them with increasing disdain.

The tsar's four daughters, Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia, were harassed; graffiti appeared on the walls making lewd suggestions about Alexandra and her murdered favourite, the peasant holy man Rasputin. Still, the family lived in hope. The arrival in early July of Yakov Yurovsky had brought the Romanovs some relief. A close friend of Lenin's, Yurovsky introduced more disciplined guards to the house who treated Nicholas's daughters with respect.

Alexandra, meanwhile, was boosted by an upturn in her son's constitution; Alexei, the couple's youngest child, was afflicted by haemophilia and had often suffered ill health. When she went to bed at about 10.30pm on 16 July, Alexandra penned a positive note in her diary. It was cool, she wrote, about 15 degrees. Maybe the family's ordeal, suffering amid the heat and tedium of Ekaterinburg, would soon abate.

A few hours later, she was woken from her slumber. Yurovsky, it transpired, was not a harbinger of hope. He roused the family and their

> "AS THE GUN SMOKE CLEARED, GROANS FROM THE BLOOD-SPATTERED FLOOR TESTIFIED TO A BUNGLED EXECUTION"



servants at about midnight, reporting that the anti-Bolshevik White Army was approaching and that the family might be in danger from heavy shelling. They were urged to dress as quickly as possible. The women wrapped themselves up in clothes sewn full of precious stones, hoping, perhaps, that this night might yet end in liberation.

At 2.15am on 17 July, the seven Romanovs along with their doctor, Eugene Botkin, and three other servants - the valet, a maid and the cook - hurried into the cool night air. Yurovsky led them from the main house across a courtyard to a small basement room at the far corner of the house.

According to one source, Nicholas was heard to say to his daughters reassuringly: "Well, we're going to get out of this place." Some believe he was simply acting as a comforting father, knowing full well the fate that lay ahead. Others believe he was speaking what he perceived as the truth. After all, if the approaching White Army were to take the town, perhaps they could be returned to more favourable circumstances. There were some monarchists among the White ranks.

The room into which the Romanovs were ushered was a tight space, less than 13 square-feet, with iron bars covering the one window. There was no furniture. A single bulb hanging overhead cast a weak light. "What, no chairs?" asked Alexandra. "May we not sit?"

Two chairs were brought in and Alexandra and Alexei sat down. Yurovsky told the 11 captives that he needed a photograph of the group to send to Moscow, where there were concerns that the family might have escaped. He set them up in two rows, Nicholas standing front and centre with his son seated next to him. Alexandra sat in her chair close to the wall and her daughters gathered around her. The servants, meanwhile, lined up behind Nicholas and Alexei.

The family was then left in peace for 30 minutes as they awaited the photographer. When Yurovsky returned, however, he brought not a camera and tripod, but a firing squad. There were six Hungarians and five Russians. As the men crowded into the room and confusion ran across the faces of the family, Yurovsky stood in the front of Nicholas holding a small piece of paper from which he read their death sentence.

"In view of the fact that your relatives are continuing their attack on Soviet Russia, the Ural Executive Committee has decided to execute you." Nicholas's jaw dropped. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. "What?" he said to Yurovsky. "What?"

Yurovsky repeated the statement and pulled a pistol from his pocket. He shot Nicholas at point-blank range. The former tsar crumpled to the floor. The firing squad then opened fire. Each man had been assigned a target but, in the constrained space, and with plenty of vodka running through the shooters' veins, a melee ensued.

The men shot poorly. Alexandra and her eldest daughter Olga each tried to make the sign of the cross but they did not have time. Alexandra took a bullet in the left side of her skull and died immediately. The doctor and two of the servants also died swiftly.

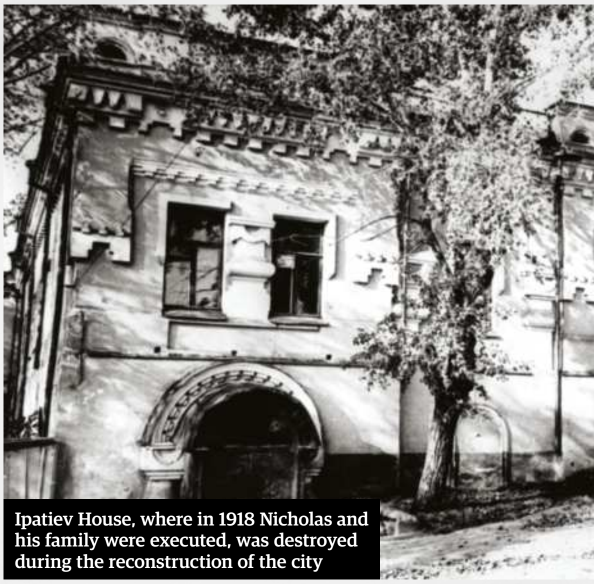
As the gun smoke cleared, groans from the blood-spattered floor testified to a bungled execution. It was the tsar's children who suffered most horribly. They had not died quickly. Some of the executioners had been temporarily deafened by the gunfire and their clothing streaked with powder burns from where their comrades had shot over their shoulders.

Alexei, at least three of the daughters and the maid all remained alive. Their clothes stuffed with jewels had, apparently, acted like bulletproof vests. According to the scholar Robert Massie, "barely visible through the smoke, Maria and Anastasia pressed against the wall, squatting, covering their heads with their arms until bullets cut them down."

Another scholar, Helen Rappaport, writing more recently, contends that the sisters were finished off with bayonets, Olga having been shot in the jaw, and Tatiana in the back of the head as she tried to escape. Last of the women to die, she says, was Anastasia, stabbed in the chest by a drunken guard before Yurovsky finished the job with his pistol.

13-year-old Alexei, it seems, was the last family member to die. Lying on the floor, says Massie, he raised his arm to shield himself before clutching at his father's shirt. "One of the executioners kicked the tsarevich in the head with his heavy boot," Massie writes. "Alexei moaned. Yurovsky stepped up and fired two shots into the boy's ear."

What scholars do agree upon is that what was planned as a quick and clean execution played out as a grim slaughter. They also agree on the time frame. It took 20 minutes for the Bolsheviks to murder the royal family and toss their mangled bodies into a truck.



Ipatiev House, where in 1918 Nicholas and his family were executed, was destroyed during the reconstruction of the city

THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION

November 1894
Nicholas II accedes to the throne after the death of his father, Alexander III, who was a far more open-minded and able monarch than his son will prove to be.

February 1904
The Russo-Japanese War erupts. The results will be devastating for Russia, Nicholas's signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth ceding power in East Asia.

January 1905
Revolution breaks out across the Russian empire amid a wave of political and social unrest. Workers go on strike and military units mutiny.

January 1905
Bloody Sunday unfolds as the Imperial Guard fires upon unarmed demonstrators, who are attempting to present a petition to the tsar at the Winter Palace.

October 1905
The October Manifesto sees Nicholas guarantee civil liberties to all Russian citizens. By signing, he creates the duma, an elected legislature.

November 1905
The peasant holy man Grigori Rasputin arrives at court. His influence there alienates many, especially after the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

Tsar Nicholas in captivity at Tsarskoe Selo

“It took 20 minutes for the Bolsheviks to murder the royal family and toss their mangled bodies into a truck”

“Given all the evidence that has come to light,” writes the historian Orlando Figes, “it is inconceivable that any of the Romanovs survived this ordeal.” The only certain survivor, he says, was Alexei’s pet spaniel, Joy.

The official announcement appeared two days later on 19 July, an editorial in the newspaper of record, *Izvestia*, claiming that Nicholas had been executed and the family sent to a safe place. News of the murder, they believed, could incite public sympathy. The truth remained largely unknown until the publication in 1924 of a book by Nikolai Sokolov, which revealed much of the horror.

Even when evidence for the death of the entire family began to leak, legends sprung up that perhaps some had survived. The legend still lives today, notes Figes, ”which merely goes to show that there is more currency - and more profit - in fiction than in history.”

The murder of the Romanovs has emerged as a story of huge significance in the history of the Russian Revolution, even though, at the time, news of the tsar’s death and rumours about the fate of his family elicited little response from the populace. Many historians, meanwhile, regarded the execution as little more than a footnote in a much larger story. After all, the revolution claimed millions of lives. Why should the death of this one family deserve particular attention?

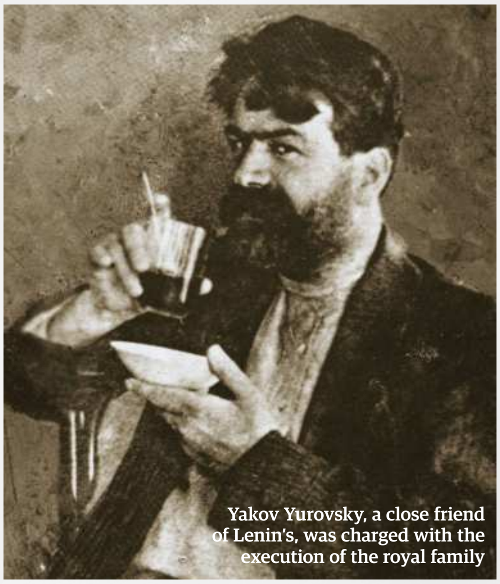
The answer, says Figes, lies in the fact that these murders were ”a declaration of the Terror. It was a statement that from now on individuals would count for nothing in the civil war.” He points to the words of the Red Army founder Leon Trotsky: “We must put an end once and for all to the papist-Quaker babble about the sanctity of human life.” Certainly, as the Russian Revolution unfolded, it showed little consideration for human life.

The Russian Revolution is, in fact, a collective name for two separate revolutions, the first coming in February 1917 and sparking the dismantling of the tsarist autocracy and the founding of a new Provisional Government. The second came in October of the same year when the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government and stirred a civil war against the anti-socialist White Army. Some scholars put the number of deaths in this conflict in the region of 12 million. The terror wrought by the Bolshevik state security service, the Cheka, meanwhile, accounted for thousands more.

It began with the February Revolution of 1917, which erupted upon the streets of the Russian capital city Petrograd (formerly St Petersburg), as food shortages took hold. On 22 February, thousands of metal and textile workers took to the streets. By 27 February, more than 200,000 workers went on strike, marching in the streets and hurling missiles at the police.

This torrent became a flood, and by the start of March, 170,000 soldiers were mingling with the insurgents and clamouring for change. The revolution was in full swing. The members of the Duma, the elected legislature, then established a temporary government having already persuaded the army generals that the tsar must abdicate. He duly obliged. Two forces brought about his downfall: the mass mobilisation of the workers and soldiers, and the political machinations of a middle-class parliamentary opposition.

“The collapse of the autocracy,” says historian Steve Smith, “was rooted in a crisis of modernisation.” During the latter half of the 19th century, the Russian state worked tirelessly to keep up with the military and economic development of the western powers. “The government hoped that it could carry out modernisation while maintaining tight control over society,” writes Smith. “Yet the effect of industrialisation, urbanisation, internal migration and the emergence of new social classes was to set in train forces that served to erode the foundations of the autocratic state.”



Yakov Yurovsky, a close friend of Lenin’s, was charged with the execution of the royal family

June 1907
As unrest abates, Prime Minister Stolypin launches a coup against the duma, limiting its power and reducing peasant representation.

January 1912
Social Democrats split into two camps, the relatively moderate Mensheviks and the more radical Bolsheviks.

July 1914
World War I breaks out and Russia, entering the war in support of Serbia, suffers a string of demoralising defeats.

November 1915
Nicholas takes personal command of the armed forces, a task for which he is ill suited. Inflation rises and food shortages ensue.

February 1917
Workers and soldiers in Petrograd take to the streets and the duma establishes the Provisional Government.

March 1917
Nicholas abdicates the throne in favour of his brother, Michael. Aware it is a poisoned chalice, Michael renounces his claim the next day.

October 1917
Vladimir Ilyich Lenin leads the Bolshevik coup, which topples the Provisional Government and leads to the outbreak of civil war.

"WHEN EVIDENCE FOR THE DEATH OF THE ENTIRE FAMILY BEGAN TO LEAK, LEGENDS SPRUNG UP THAT PERHAPS SOME HAD SURVIVED"

This erosion was concentrated in the emergence of an industrial proletariat "snatched from the plough and hurled into the factory furnace," in Trotsky's famous words. Concentrated in large numbers for the first time, they emerged as a collective with considerable political clout. As Smith points out, the workers' new urban lives offered them education and cultural diversity while also exposing them to the "subversive political ideas of Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries. The wretched conditions in which workers lived, the drudgery of their work and their pitiful wages heightened their sense of separateness not only from the government but from privileged society in general."

In addition, a new social group had emerged during the 19th century, defined less by its socioeconomic position than by its attitude towards imperial power. This 'intelligentsia' filtered through different strata of Russian society as time went on, seeping into the new middle classes, and even the upper classes as the aristocrats became more commercially aware.

These social groups united to ignite the flames of revolution that burned during the 1905 uprising. This the tsar survived, having in the October Manifesto agreed to the formation of an elected legislature and the concession of many civil rights. Though autocratic power was weakened, it was not necessarily doomed.

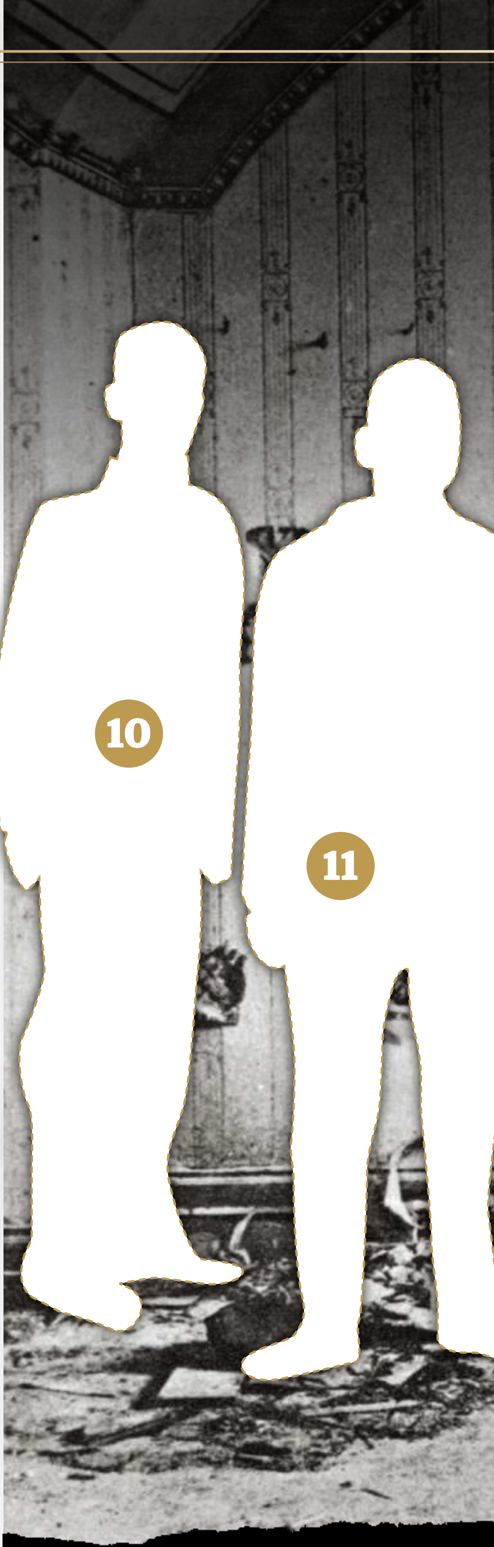
It took the outbreak of World War I to finally bring down the tsar. The first year of conflict proved disastrous for Russia, and in November 1915, Nicholas took command of the armed forces. This was a misguided decision. Hundreds of thousands died in the trenches. "Throughout his reign," writes Orlando Figes, "Nicholas gave the impression of being unable to cope with the task of ruling a vast empire in the grips of a deepening revolutionary crisis."

He certainly could not cope with commanding the armed forces, a task for which he was poorly qualified. Alexandra, meanwhile, interfered in governmental business on the home front while her relationship with her favourite, Rasputin, caused outrage among common folk and officials alike. Stories of sexual relations between the peasant and the tsarina, though unfounded, were rife. Nicholas, meanwhile, was forced to raise taxes to pay for the war. Foreign debt increased, as did inflation. When food shortages set in, the populace could take no more. The tsar's days were numbered. Indeed, Figes points to a popular Russian joke that says the tsar himself should have been awarded the Order of the Red Banner for services to the revolution.

Once Nicholas abdicated and the Bolsheviks under Lenin took control of the country later in the year, they pledged to put 'Bloody Nicholas' on trial. Yet both he and his family were murdered. Was this because the Bolsheviks were worried that the White Army would take Ekaterinburg, liberate Nicholas and use him as a totem? As Figes notes, it is highly unlikely that the Whites would want such an unpopular and discredited figure as their 'live banner'. Rather, he says, it was the idea of a trial that became problematic.

To put Nicholas in the dock, Figes says, was to presuppose the possibility of his innocence. "And in that case, the moral legitimacy of the revolution would itself be open to question. Nicholas had to die so that Soviet power could live."

Duma messengers protected by armed guards during the Russian Revolution, 1917



Nicholas Alexandrovich Romanov

AGE AT DEATH: 50

The last tsar of Russia oversaw a disastrous war with Japan and the establishment of the duma. He took command of the army during 1915 and was asked to abdicate two years later.

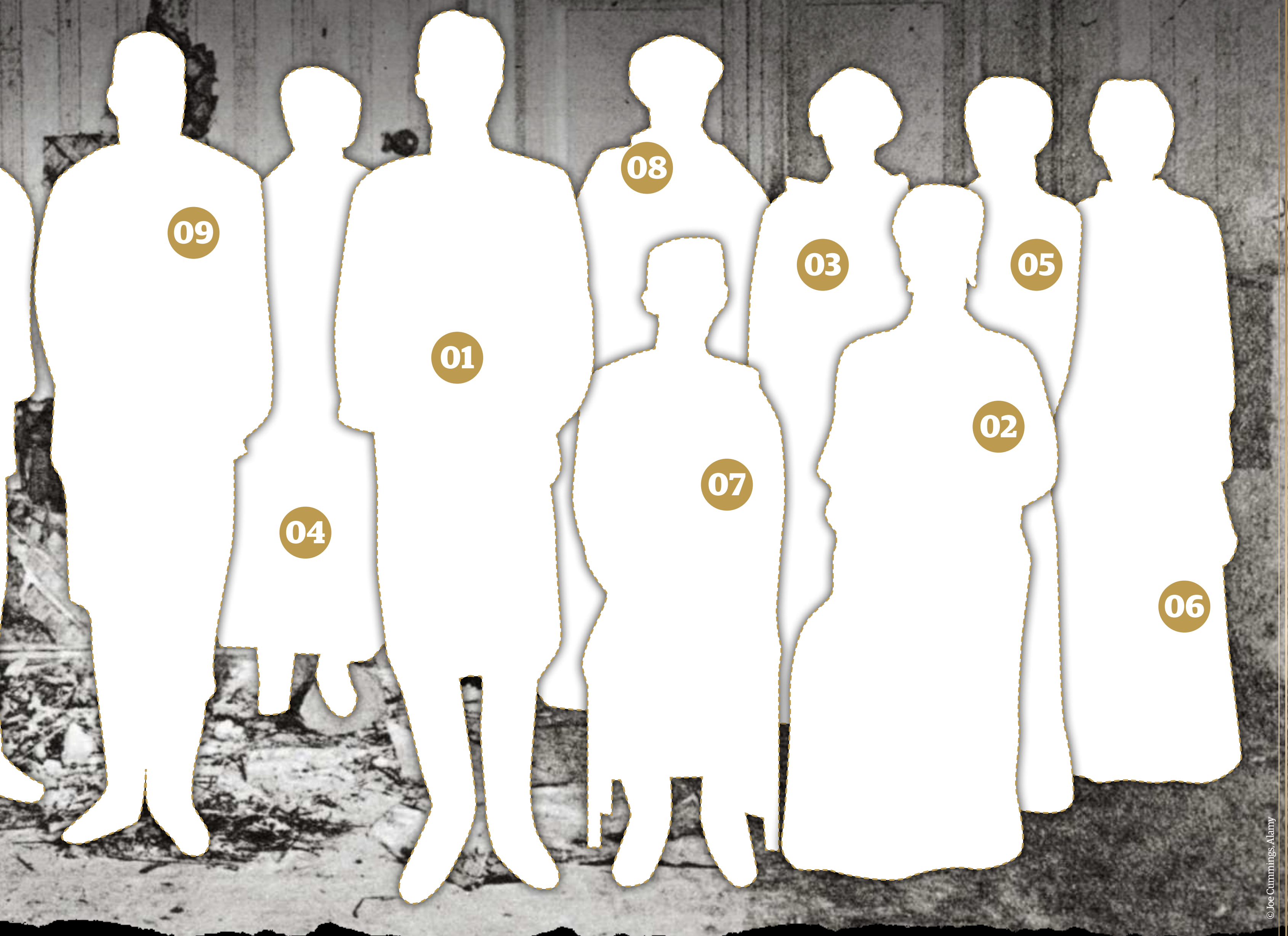
Alexandra Feodorovna

AGE AT DEATH: 46

A pious and spiritual woman, Alexandra was a devoted mother. She fell under the influence of Rasputin and meddled in governmental policy during WWI.

THE MASSACRE

Posed for a family photograph, the Romanovs were slaughtered instead



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03

Grand Duchess Olga Nikolaevna

AGE AT DEATH: 22

As a youngster, Olga was devoted to her father but often quarrelled with her mother. She was said to be a generous and charitable woman.

04

Grand Duchess Tatiana Nikolaevna

AGE AT DEATH: 21

Tatiana was said to be practical with a knack for leadership, her sisters calling her the 'The Governess'.

05

Grand Duchess Maria Nikolaevna

AGE AT DEATH: 19

Maria was not as lively as her three sisters, and though usually sweet natured, she could also be stubborn and lazy.

06

Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna

AGE AT DEATH: 17

The youngest daughter was energetic though sometimes in poor health. She had a close relationship with Rasputin.

07

Tsarevich Alexei Nikolaevich

AGE AT DEATH: 13

Alexei's haemophilia was severe and it was the tsarina's bid to help him that allowed Rasputin into the family fold.

08

Anna Demidova

AGE AT DEATH: 40

Demidova travelled with the tsarina as her maid when the family went into captivity. The executioners bayoneted her more than 30 times.

09

Dr Eugene Botkin

AGE AT DEATH: 53

Dr Botkin was said to have felt it his duty to follow the Romanovs into exile to help Alexei. He shared the Romanovs' 16 months of captivity.

10

Alexei Trupp

AGE AT DEATH: 59-60

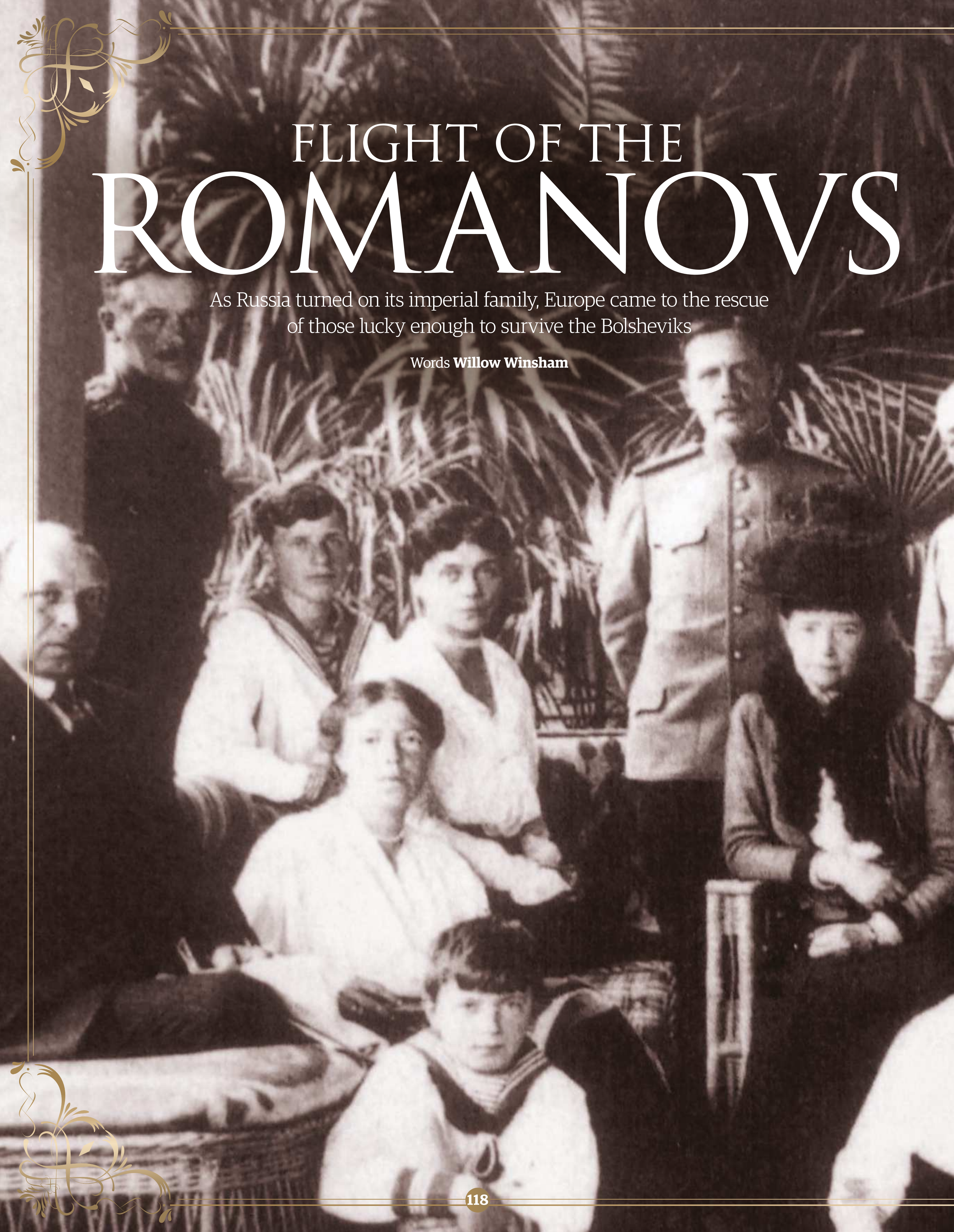
Trupp was born in modern-day Latvia and became a footman in the royal household. Serving as Nicholas's valet, he shared the family's captivity and died quickly.

11

Ivan Kharitonov

AGE AT DEATH: 45-46

The cook shared the family's captivity and, like Trupp and Botkin, is thought to have died quickly during the executioners' initial salvo.



FLIGHT OF THE ROMANOVS

As Russia turned on its imperial family, Europe came to the rescue of those lucky enough to survive the Bolsheviks

Words **Willow Winsham**

The Romanov family under house arrest in the Crimea before their rescue in 1919

When Nicholas II was forced to abdicate in March 1917, there were few who could have foreseen where things would end for the Russian tsar and his immediate family. The tsar, his wife the former tsarina Alexandra, their four daughters, Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia and the young and ailing Alexei, the tsar's heir, suffered numerous humiliations and deprivations over the months to follow, the mighty brought devastatingly low.

By the fateful day of 16 July 1918, the family had been under house arrest in Ekaterinburg for 78 days. At the mercy of their Bolshevik captors, their spirits were low as, despite rumours of rescue, the days continued to pass and help did not arrive. That night, the family were woken and instructed to dress, before making their way downstairs. No doubt confused as to what was occurring, they were joined by the doctor who oversaw the care of the ailing tsarevich, the tsar's valet, the family cook, and a maid, the latter carrying the family jewels sewn inside a pillow, and were told that they were to be moved for their own safety as the advancing army was nearing Ekaterinburg. Instead of being taken from the house, the family were escorted into a basement, where they waited at the pleasure of their captors.

It was not until the arrival of a contingent of armed men, headed by Yakov Yurovsky, the man in charge of the guards who watched the former imperial family, that their fate became clear; Yurovsky informed the tsar that he and the others were to be shot.

The murder of the Russian imperial family is perhaps one of the best-known and most intriguing tragedies of the 20th century. Amid the rampant debate and speculation that surrounds the story, one of the recurring questions is why the terrible events happened at all, and, crucially, why were Nicholas II and his family left to suffer their horrendous fate - a destiny that had been predicted years before by many?

One direction in which the finger of blame has been pointed is towards the British monarch, King George V. First cousin to the ill-fated tsar, his failure - or downright refusal - to help Nicholas and his family has often been met with great censure from historians and enthusiasts alike. It cannot, of course, be denied that George failed to save his cousin and his family, but to what extent should he be tarred with such a legacy? Politically, there was good reason for George to think twice before offering refuge to his deposed cousin, despite the latter's perilous situation. Although the two were close and on good terms, the delicate political situation left the British king with a stark choice between family and his country and crown.

Indeed, in the wake of the Russian Revolution and the Great War, George was accused by some of being 'too German' due to his family connections: after all, the German kaiser was a first cousin of the British king, and the Russian tsar himself was a third cousin to Wilhelm II. Letting the fleeing Romanovs into the country was, it was feared, a sure-fire way to bring revolution and chaos to Britain that the country and the monarch could ill-afford. Speaking in favour of George V, Prince Michael of Kent defended the king by maintaining that it was the vehement opposition of the British people that kept George from acting, and that even then, moves were made to rescue his cousin, with several plans made and thwarted before they could come to anything.

It must also be remembered that hindsight is perfect but useless: George cannot have known for certain the terrible fate that awaited 'Nicky' and his family. Rather than solely blaming the British king, blame has often been placed at the door of the prime minister of the time, Lloyd George, with George V apologists insisting it was the minister who had the final say. This theory was discredited in the 1980s however, when sealed cabinet papers revealed that the prime minister had not been the one to sway the king's decision.

Another popular argument, especially within the British royal family, maintains that Queen Mary, George's wife, was the fly in the ointment and the reason for British refusal to give the Romanovs refuge. Derided as a heartless harridan and as having too much influence on the king, Mary has received bad press over the years for her supposed role in swaying her husband's mind. There has been no official proof of this however, and cabinet papers remain silent on the matter.

What of help from other quarters in Europe? Spain, Sweden and Norway, among others, all made moves to help the Romanovs, but such plans failed, evaporated or were turned down. It has been suggested that the tsar himself played a role in the ultimate fate of his family, and it seems that not only the tsar but also the wider Romanov family who remained in Russia, did not fully appreciate the danger that threatened them. Grand Duke Kirill, cousin to Nicholas II and the man who took his place as head of the family, was one of the few to take heed of the perilous situation in Russia: with permission granted by the Provisional Government, he moved to Borga, Finland, in June 1917.

This, however, was the first and only move from the family: due to a variety of factors, no more Romanovs were to leave Russia until late 1918, a delay which had grievous consequences and cost the lives of many. Ultimately, it must also be remembered that the tsar and his family had been held under house arrest with the belief - shared by the family and other powers of Europe - that they were to stand trial. That the unthinkable could happen was not something that either side had realised until it was much too late.

Unfortunately, the tsar and his family were not the only Romanov casualties during 1918. The tsar's younger brother, Grand Duke Michael, was murdered in Perm in June, just a month before the massacre of the tsar and his household at Ekaterinburg. To add to the tragedy, the tsarina's sister, Elisabeth, who had become a nun after the assassination of her husband, Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, in 1905 was, along with one of the

Maria Feodorovna fled Russia and took up residence in England, before returning to her homeland of Denmark

"THE TSAR AND HIS FAMILY WERE NOT THE ONLY ROMANOV CASUALTIES DURING 1918"

H. M. S. Marlborough

tsar's cousins and three princes of Romanov blood, buried alive in a mineshaft the night after the tsar was murdered. Tragically, the German kaiser, enemy to Britain and Russia, had offered refuge to Elisabeth on several occasions, but his help had been firmly rebuffed.

Although the death of the tsar was finally admitted, no official word was given regarding his wife and children, or the other murdered Romanovs. Rumours abounded, and it was nearly impossible for those who remained to know the truth of what happened. But it became clear that the time had come to leave Russia, and as the year progressed, the exodus began.

Grand Duchess Elizabeth, the wife of Grand Duke Konstantine and mother of the princes that had been buried alive, took refuge in Sweden in November 1918. Accompanying her were her two youngest children and two of her grandchildren. Prince Gabriel, the eldest son to survive of the Grand Duke Konstantine, was imprisoned but eventually released, finding refuge in Finland with the help of writer Maxim Gorki. Other members of the family were offered or sought refuge in Romania and Denmark, and this time help was more forthcoming. King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy and the kings of Montenegro and Sweden courted the Romanovs, with varying degrees of success. There were still those who were reluctant to leave however, and it was February 1920 by the time the last of the Romanovs left for good.

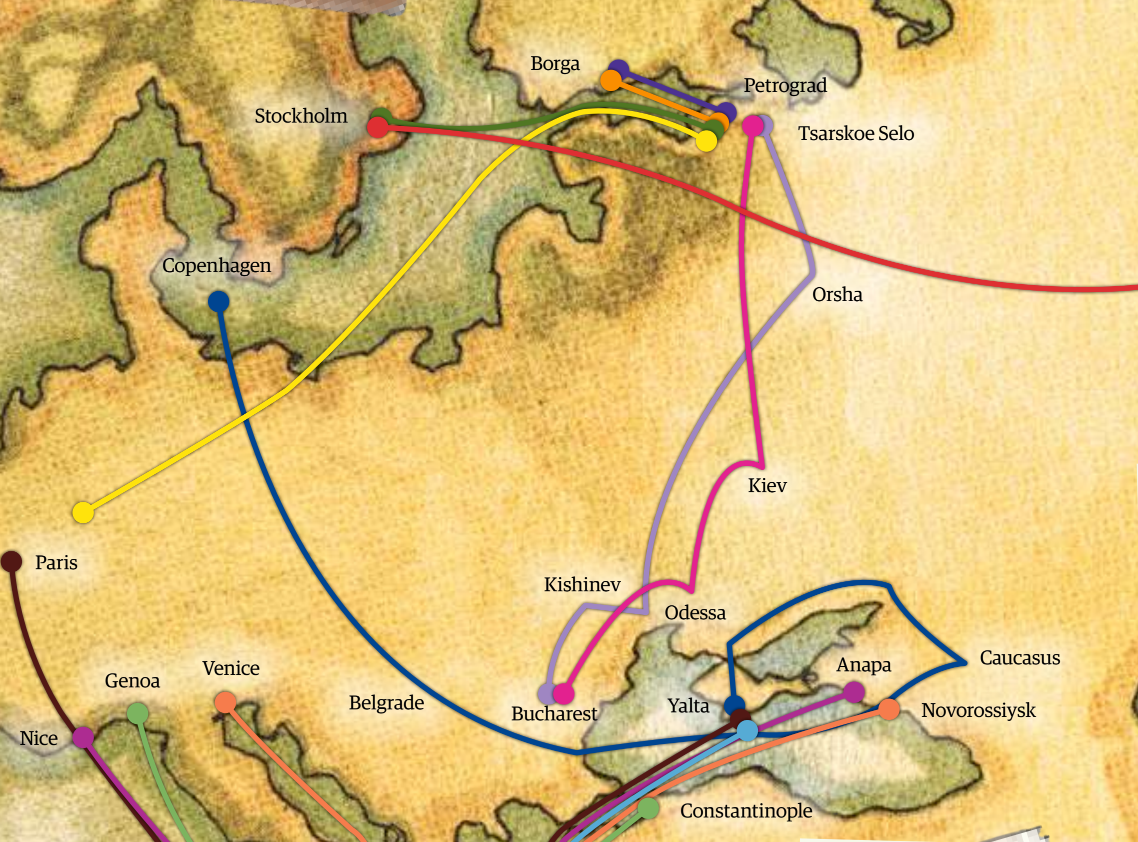
In spite of - or perhaps because of - the failure to rescue the tsar and his ill-fated family, Britain was at the forefront of the biggest rescue expedition launched to help the remaining Romanovs in Russia. The two largest and most prominent groups were those headed by the dowager empress, Maria Feodorovna - mother to the murdered tsar and Grand Duke Michael - and Grand Duke Nicholas, former commander-in-chief of the Russian Army and first cousin once removed of Tsar Nicholas II. The two families had been residing in the Crimea since retreating there in 1917, where they were effectively held under house arrest, the dowager empress inhabiting the estate of Ai-Todor while the Grand Duke Nicholas resided at the nearby Dulber estate.

Now, in the wake of the Armistice being signed, the British government was growing increasingly worried, and a concerted effort was made to extract the dowager empress - sister to Queen Alexandra, wife of Edward VII - before she could suffer the same fate as her massacred sons. Maria Feodorovna however, was less than co-operative;

King George V with his cousin, Tsar Nicholas II

THE ROMANOV SURVIVAL GUIDE

Not all of the Romanovs fled aboard the HMS Marlborough, so how did the remaining survivors escape?


Borga
Petrograd
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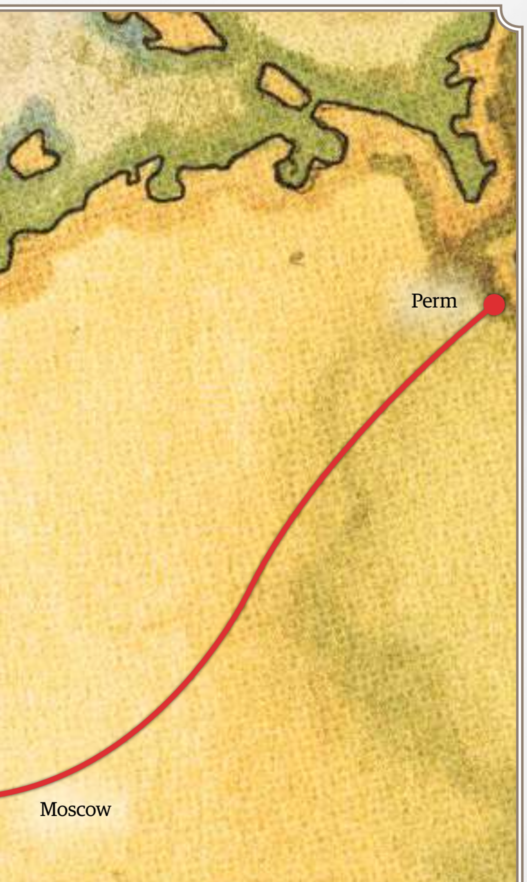
Tsarskoe Selo
Copenhagen
Orsha
Kiev
Paris
Kishinev
Odessa
Caucasus
Anapa
Genoa
Venice
Belgrade
Bucharest
Yalta
Novorossiysk
Nice
Constantinople
Malta

A Russian refugee plays aboard the HMS Marlborough

The estate at Dulber, Crimea, where Grand Duke Nicholas resided before his rescue

Flight of the Romanovs



A group of Red Guards resting in the streets of Petrograd, 1917

ROUTE 1

Petrograd-Borga
Survivors:
Grand Duke Kirill Vladimirovich
Grand Duchess Victoria Feodorovna
Princess Kira Kirillovna
Princess Marie Kirillovna

In June 1917, Grand Duke Kirill, his pregnant wife and their daughters fled Petrograd to Borga, Finland, after receiving permission from the Provisional Government.

ROUTE 2

Petrograd-Borga
Survivors:
Prince Gabriel Konstantinovich
Antonina Rafailovna Nesterovskaya

Having been imprisoned in Petrograd, Prince Gabriel's wife, Antonina, and writer Maxim Gorki fought to bring about Gabriel's release, which happened in 1918. The couple fled to Finland, later settling down in Paris.

ROUTE 3

Petrograd-Stockholm
Survivors:
Grand Duchess Elizabeth Mavrikievna
Prince Georgy Konstantinovich
Princess Vera Konstantinovich
Prince Vsevolod Ivanovich
Princess Catherine Ivanovna

With permission from the government, the group accepted Queen Victoria of Sweden's invitation and set sail aboard the Angermanland in November 1918.

ROUTE 4

Tsarskoe Selo-Orsha-Odessa-Kishinev-Bucharest
Survivors:
Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna the Younger
Prince Sergei Mikhailovich Puliatin

The couple fled Petrograd in July 1918, aiming to reach the south of Russia, which was held by German forces. After receiving an invite from Queen Marie of Romania, the pair sought refuge in Bucharest. To prove her royal identity, Marie stashed her papers in a bar of soap, ensuring the pair were quickly taken to safety.

ROUTE 5

Perm-Moscow-Stockholm
Survivors:
Princess Elena Petrovna

Having been captured and taken prisoner, Helen was sent to prison in Perm. With the insistence of Norwegian diplomats, she was moved to Moscow and later fled Russia to Sweden.

ROUTE 6

Petrograd-Switzerland
Survivors:
Grand Duchess Olga Konstantinovna

The dowager queen of Greece had returned to her homeland, where she set up a military hospital when WWI broke out. When she tried to leave Russia, she was retained. It was only when the Danish government intervened that she was permitted to leave. She went to Switzerland to join her son, Constantine I of Greece.

ROUTE 7

Tsarskoe Selo-Kiev-Odessa-Bucharest
Survivors:
Princess Tatiana Konstantinovna
Prince Teymuraz Constantinovich Bagration
Princess Natalia Constantinovna Bagration

Tatiana and her children had lived with her uncle, but upon his arrest she fled south through Kiev and Odessa, finally reaching Romania in 1919.

ROUTE 8

Yalta-Paris
Survivors:
Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich
Prince Andrei Alexandrovich
Elisabetta Ruffo Di Sant'Antimo

Under the pretence of representing the Romanov family at the Paris Peace Conference, Grand Duke Alexander fled with his eldest son and daughter-in-law aboard the HMS Forsythe in December 1918.

ROUTE 9

Anapa-Constantinople-Nice
Survivors:
Grand Duke Boris Vladimirovich
Zina Sergeivna Raschevskaya

Boris escaped Russia via Anapa with his mistress (later his wife). The pair eventually settled in France.

ROUTE 10

Yalta-Constantinople-Malta
Survivors:
Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna
Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna
Princess Irina Alexandrovna Yusupova
Prince Felix Yusupov
Prince Felix Felixovich
Princess Zinaida Nikolaevna
Princess Irina Felixovna Yusupova
Prince Feodor Alexandrovich
Prince Nikita Alexandrovich
Prince Dmitri Alexandrovich
Prince Rostislav Alexandrovich
Prince Vasili Alexandrovich

ROUTE 11

Constantinople-Genoa
Survivors:
Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich
Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna (of Montenegro)
Prince Sergei Georgievich
Princess Helen Georgievna of Leuchtenberg
Count Stefan Tyszkiewicz
Grand Duke Peter Nikolaevich
Grand Duchess Militza Nikolaevna
Prince Roman Petrovich
Princess Marina Petrovna
Princess Nadejda Petrovna Orlova
Prince Nicholas Vladimirovich Orlov
Princess Irina Nikolaevna Orlova

ROUTE 12

Yalta-Caucasus-Novorossiysk-Belgrade-Copenhagen
Survivors:
Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna
Nicholas Alexandrovich Kulikovsky
Tikhon Nikolaevich
Guri Nikolaevich

Initially travelling the same route to Yalta as her mother, Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna, Olga was determined to stay in Russia and travelled along the coast to Novorossiysk. In early 1920 the family fled to Serbia, and later on to Copenhagen.

ROUTE 13

Novorossiysk-Venice
Survivors:
Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna the Elder
Grand Duke Andrei Vladimirovich
Mathilda-Marie Feliksovna Kschessinskaya
Prince Vladimir Andreivich Krassinsky

The last of the Romanovs to flee Russia, Maria, her son, his mistress and their child fled on the Semiranisa, an Italian liner that took them to Italy.

San Anton Palace in Malta, where Maria Feodorovna resided for a matter of days before continuing her journey to Britain

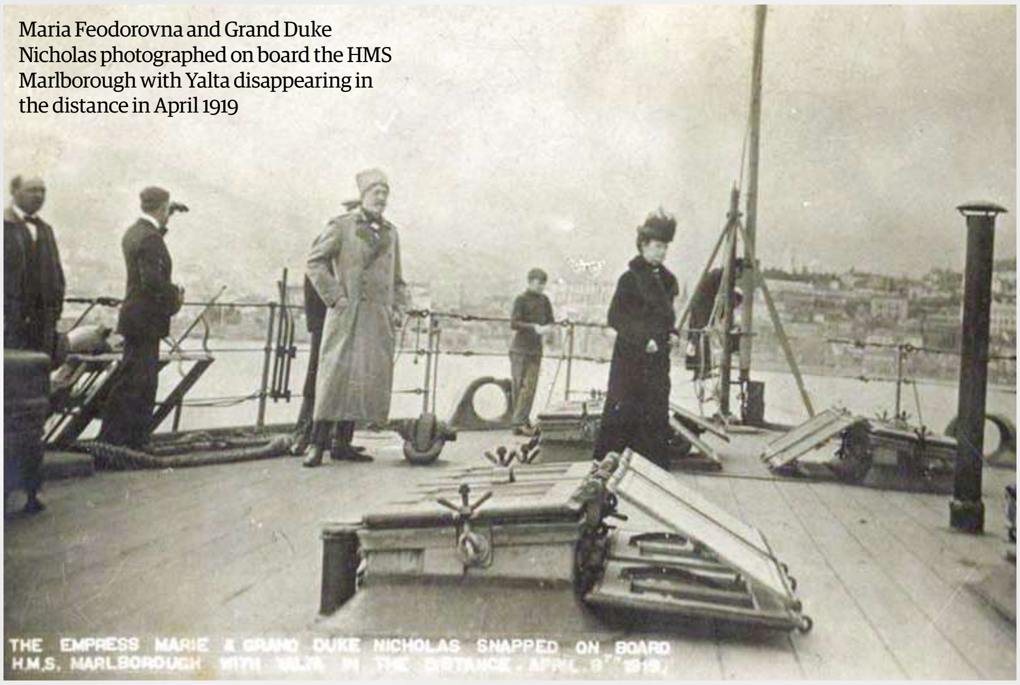
an initial plan for a secret rescue had already been rejected. When her sister, Alexandra, wrote in December of 1918, adding her voice to those who were, with varying degrees of firmness, telling the dowager empress that she should leave, Maria merely thanked her kindly for her concern but informed her sister that she would be remaining in Russia for Christmas. Matters grew increasingly pressing, until George V himself intervened. The Romanov parties from Ai-Todor and Dulber would be evacuated by the British Navy along with other refugees and taken to safety, and plans were drawn up for the operation to be carried out quickly. Even then it was April 1919 before the dowager empress accepted the inevitable, finally agreeing to leave only after she was assured that her own ship would be the last to leave Russia.

The HMS Marlborough was to remove the remaining Romanovs from the Crimea – a war ship that might be considered ill-designed for the carrying of such esteemed passengers. Within any family tensions exist, and the Romanovs were no exception. This fact was exacerbated by the heightened political situation in Russia and the circumstances they had lived through. Maria Feodorovna and Grand Duke Nicholas, despite being neighbours in their Crimean estates, were decidedly at odds with one another, and this feud was to echo bitterly through the voyage.

The 7 April 1919, the day designated for the families to embark, did not get off to a good start; Maria Feodorovna was late to arrive, causing worry and annoyance among family and crew alike. Once the Romanovs were aboard, it was apparent that the captain of the HMS Marlborough had been ill-informed, as there were many more people than they had expected, not to mention the family dogs. There was a vast quantity of unlabelled luggage that had to be reunited with each owner, a feat finally achieved by first lieutenant Pridham with the help of the Grand Duchess Marina, the only one aboard who could speak Russian and English.

There were some striking personages on board the Marlborough that day. Grand Duke Nicholas had arrived in full military uniform, proud and resplendent. Four generations of Romanovs were on board, a poignant representation of what remained of the once-great family. Not only that, among the passengers was Prince Felix Yusupov, the murderer of Rasputin.

It was an emotional day: the sons of Grand Duchess Xenia had each taken a bag of soil from the Ai-Todor estate from the area that held most



Maria Feodorovna and Grand Duke Nicholas photographed on board the HMS Marlborough with Yalta disappearing in the distance in April 1919

THE EMPRESS MARIE & GRAND DUKE NICHOLAS SNAPPED ON BOARD
H.M.S. MARLBOROUGH WITH YALTA IN THE DISTANCE. APRIL 8TH 1919.

meaning. And with some hasty adjustments (and grumbling from the dowager empress at the taking of the best sleeping spots by Grand Duke Nicholas and his party), the exiles were settled into what was to be their home for the journey.

More refugees making up the remnants of the Russian aristocracy and 200 tonnes of luggage were taken on board British ships at Yalta over the next few days. As promised, the HMS Marlborough was the last to depart, setting sail on 11 April. It was not a moment too soon; Yalta became a bloodbath shortly after, those who remained there at the mercy of both Red and White Armies as the town descended into chaos.

The Romanov refugees were stoical about their situation. The dowager empress ensconced herself on deck and received company there on a daily basis, while the princes experimented with magic tricks and the children roamed the ship, amusing and exasperating crew. Despite their differences, one thing all the fleeing Romanovs held in common was a great interest in eating, which was hardly surprising after the months of deprivation they'd experienced; meat had been an infrequent luxury, and the memory of coffee made from roasted acorns one that would not be quick to fade.

Despite memorial services being held for the tsar and Grand Duke Michael at Ai-Todor, the dowager empress flatly refused to entertain the notion that her sons were dead by the time she embarked the HMS Marlborough. She clung to the belief that he was still alive throughout the voyage. Indeed, it was five years after her voyage on the HMS Marlborough that the death of Grand Duke Michael was proven without a doubt, while the remains of the tsar and his family had still not yet been discovered before her death in 1928, at the age of 80 in Denmark.

One thing that is striking from the accounts is the fondness with which the crew of the HMS Marlborough came to hold their passengers. In return, it seems that the Romanovs held the ship's officers with high regard. As an expression of this, Maria Feodorovna, Grand Duke Nicholas and their families were keen not to cause trouble for their hosts, going out of their way to be polite, courteous, and grateful for every kindness. The friendships made during the voyage did not dissolve when the families left either; many kept in touch, and Pridham not only named his third child after the dowager empress, but asked that Maria Feodorovna be the child's godmother. Something else that was remarked upon was how the Romanovs treated the servants that had accompanied them into exile; rather than the haughty, imperious tyrants portrayed across the British press, the exiles were at pains to make sure their retainers had every comfort that could be given to them.

Empress Maria Feodorovna's bedroom, left, and study at Hvidøre, her residence in Denmark

"FOUR GENERATIONS OF ROMANOVS WERE ON BOARD THE HMS MARLBOROUGH"

Throughout the voyage, the eventual destination for the fleeing families was uncertain. Malta was mooted as an option, and official, albeit secret, preparations were made in that direction, with telegrams exchanged and instructions given for the governor's house to be readied for the use of the dowager empress herself. There were mixed messages, however, as another telegram to the Admiralty intimated that the dowager and her family were to be taken to England, while the Grand Duke Nicholas and his party were destined for Constantinople before journeying onwards. It was this latter scenario that was to prove correct, and the two parties went their separate ways, with the grand duke and his relations transferring to the HMS Nelson, to travel on to Genoa, Italy. Grand Duke Nicholas and his party left the Marlborough on 16 April and the ship set sail the day after, taking them on their way and leaving the dowager empress and her party to continue on alone, effectively ending their voyage feud.

Easter – a time of great importance to the Romanovs – was spent on board the Marlborough, with gifts swapped between exiles and crew. Gifts were also exchanged on 20 April, their final night on board, and the next day Maria Feodorovna and her party transferred to HMS Nelson to continue to England. This was not to be the dowager's final residence however, and her time in England with the royal family was to prove short-lived. Come August 1919 she was ready to move on, tensions between her and her sister along with a dissatisfaction at her decline in status prompting a move to Denmark, her country of birth. After an equally tumultuous time with her nephew, King Christian, she finally retired to Hvidøre, where she remained until her death several years later.

The remains of the tsar and his family were discovered in 1991 and laid to rest in St Petersburg; the remains of Alexei and the remaining daughter were finally discovered in 2007. The Russian Church Abroad canonised the murdered Romanovs in 1981, but it wasn't until 2000 that the Russian Orthodox Church did the same. Nearly a century after the slaughter of the tsar and his family and the escape of the remaining Romanovs, the question of whether the appalling events of 1918 could have been averted and who could or should have done so, is still not easily answered. But it is hoped that the much maligned and venerated family has finally found peace.

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ANASTASIA

THE MYSTERY OF THE LOST GIRL

As rumours of the youngest grand duchess's survival flourished, one woman's incredible claim catapulted her to fame

Words **Greg King**

Early on the morning of 17 July 1918, shots rang out from the basement of the ornate Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg, where the Bolsheviks had imprisoned former tsar Nicholas II and his family. 30 minutes later, a truck rumbled out of the gate and into the dark Siberian night. No one ever saw the Romanovs again. Just two months earlier, four young women had entered the Ipatiev House: Grand Duchesses Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia, the beautiful daughters of Nicholas and Alexandra. This last prison was a far cry from the opulent world of Anastasia's birth on 18 June 1901 - a world of palaces, yachts and bowing courtiers. Yet like her three sisters, she was brought up simply, sharing a bedroom with Maria, sleeping on an army camp bed and taking cold baths.

Anastasia was blessed with fine features and vibrant blue eyes, but felt cursed by her short stature. Everyone agreed that she was vivacious and intelligent, even if her tutor Pierre Gilliard complained that she was "extremely idle, though with the idleness of a gifted child." She'd carved out a place in her family through wit and cutting humour. Anastasia had been a tomboy princess, climbing trees and terrifying relatives with practical jokes. "She undoubtedly held the record for punishable deeds in her family," recalled Gleb Botkin, son of the imperial physician, "for in naughtiness she was a true genius."

By the time her father abdicated the throne in 1917, the golden-haired, blue-eyed girl was beginning to blossom. But for Anastasia there would be no debut balls, no parties: imprisoned in Siberia first by the Provisional Government and then by Lenin's Bolsheviks, she turned 17 in this dirty mining town, surrounded by crude soldiers and a growing aura of menace as the civil war between the Red and White Armies waged around Ekaterinburg.

The Soviet government told the world that Nicholas II had been executed on 17 July 1918: no mention was made of his family. White Army investigator Nicholas Sokolov declared that Ipatiev House commandant Yakov Yurovsky and his men had shot all the Romanovs and the four retainers imprisoned with them - but Sokolov never found any corpses. He theorised that Yurovsky had taken them to the nearby Koptyaki Forest, dismembered the bodies, burned them, and then dissolved what was left in acid before hurling the remains down a mine shaft.

The absence of any tangible Romanov remains fed rumours that one or more members of the family might have escaped. After all, nobody really knew what had happened that July night in 1918, and stories filtered out of Siberia describing how the Bolsheviks had desperately searched for a missing grand duchess in the days after the Ekaterinburg massacre. Although suspecting the worst, many Russian émigrés who fled to Europe still clung to the hope that someone had survived.

Fast-forward nearly two years to one cold February night in 1920 - a young woman was rescued from a Berlin canal. At some point she had suffered violence: her jaw was battered and broken, her teeth were loose, and doctors speculated that a glancing bullet had caused a slight impression on her head. After she refused to give her name, authorities took her to Dalldorf Asylum, where she remained a largely silent enigma. She wasn't crazy - on this the doctors and nurses agreed - but she would not speak of her past, at least until 1922, when she stunned everyone by announcing that she was Anastasia, miraculously rescued from slaughter by a sympathetic soldier who'd spirited her out of Russia.

The story spread through the émigré community like wildfire: exiled aristocrats visited the young lady's bedside and argued about her appearance and ability to speak Russian. Empress Alexandra's sister, Princess Irene of Prussia, apparently found 'Anastasia Tchaikovsky,' as the claimant began calling herself, unconvincing. "I saw immediately that she could not be one of my nieces," she insisted. But later she seemed torn, muttering, "She is similar, but what does it mean if it is not she?" Irene, like many, wrestled with some apparently startling coincidences: the claimant shared the real Anastasia's height, her blue eyes, a deformation of the feet called hallux valgus, and seemed to know intimate details of life within the imperial family.

How best to resolve the mystery? In the summer of 1925, Nicholas II's sister, Grand Duchess Olga, asked Anastasia's former tutor, Pierre Gilliard, to visit the claimant. "If it is really she, telegraph me and I will join you in Berlin," she urged. Although Gilliard could not find the slightest resemblance to

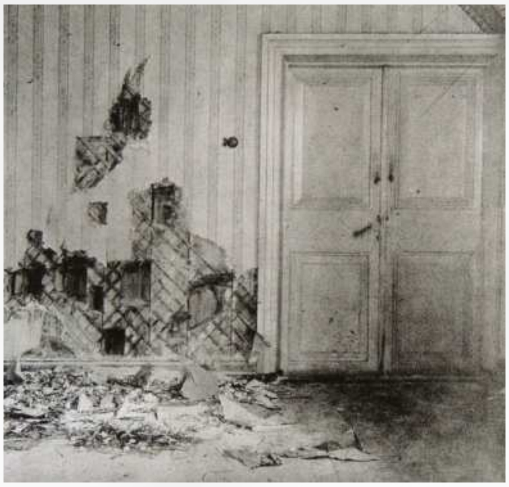
Grand Duchess Anastasia was the fourth daughter of Tsar Nicholas II and his wife Empress Alexandra. Claims of her survival have made her the most famous of all Russian princesses

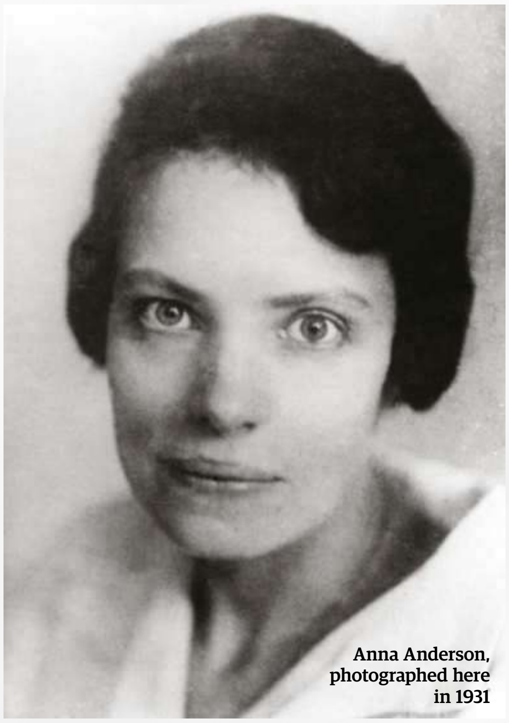
Anastasia, he didn't want the responsibility of making a final decision. That autumn, Olga herself came to Berlin; as Anastasia's godmother and one of the few people who had regularly visited Nicholas and Alexandra, she was best positioned to render a verdict.

No-one agrees on what happened next. The claimant's supporters insisted that Olga and Gilliard recognised her as Anastasia; the grand duchess even followed the visit with letters, assuring this 'Anastasia Tchaikovsky', as she called herself, that she, "was not alone, and we shall not abandon you." But, privately, Olga confided that she had not found her niece in Berlin after all. "I believe the story is fraudulent," she eloquently wrote, "but many people believe it and they are the ones who never knew the real Anastasia."

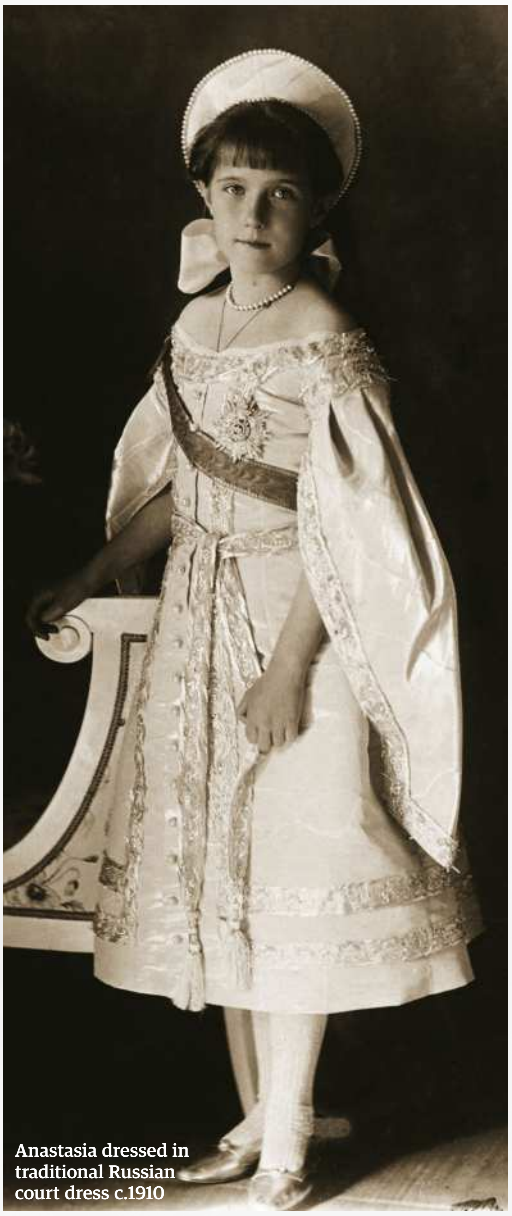
According to her cousin, Grand Duke Andrei (who recognised the claimant as Anastasia), Olga was less adamant in private: she had been forced to deny her, or so this explanation went, to spare the feelings of her elderly mother, Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna. It would become a common theme: grand dukes and duchesses, princes and princesses accepting or rejecting the claimant amid charges of family pressures that tore Europe's royal houses apart. Anastasia Tchaikovsky was not without impressive supporters. The real grand duchess's cousin, Prince Sigismund of Prussia, declared her genuine after she answered an apparently obscure list of questions. Empress Alexandra's friend Lili Dehn was equally convinced: "What can I say after having known her? I certainly cannot be mistaken in her identity."

Gleb Botkin and his sister Tatiana, whose father had been executed with the family in Ekaterinburg, became two of the claimant's most vocal supporters. Both insisted the young woman was Anastasia, although they admitted her physical appearance had altered. Botkin became her protector in 1928, arranging for her to visit

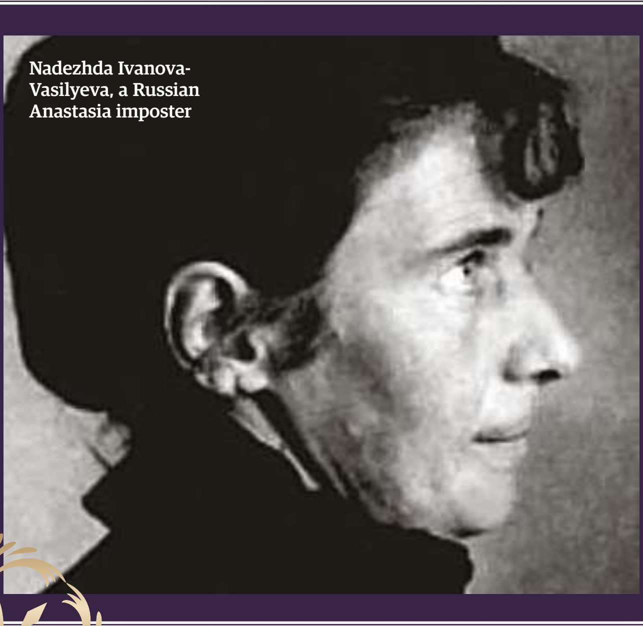




Anna Anderson, photographed here in 1931



Anastasia dressed in traditional Russian court dress c.1910

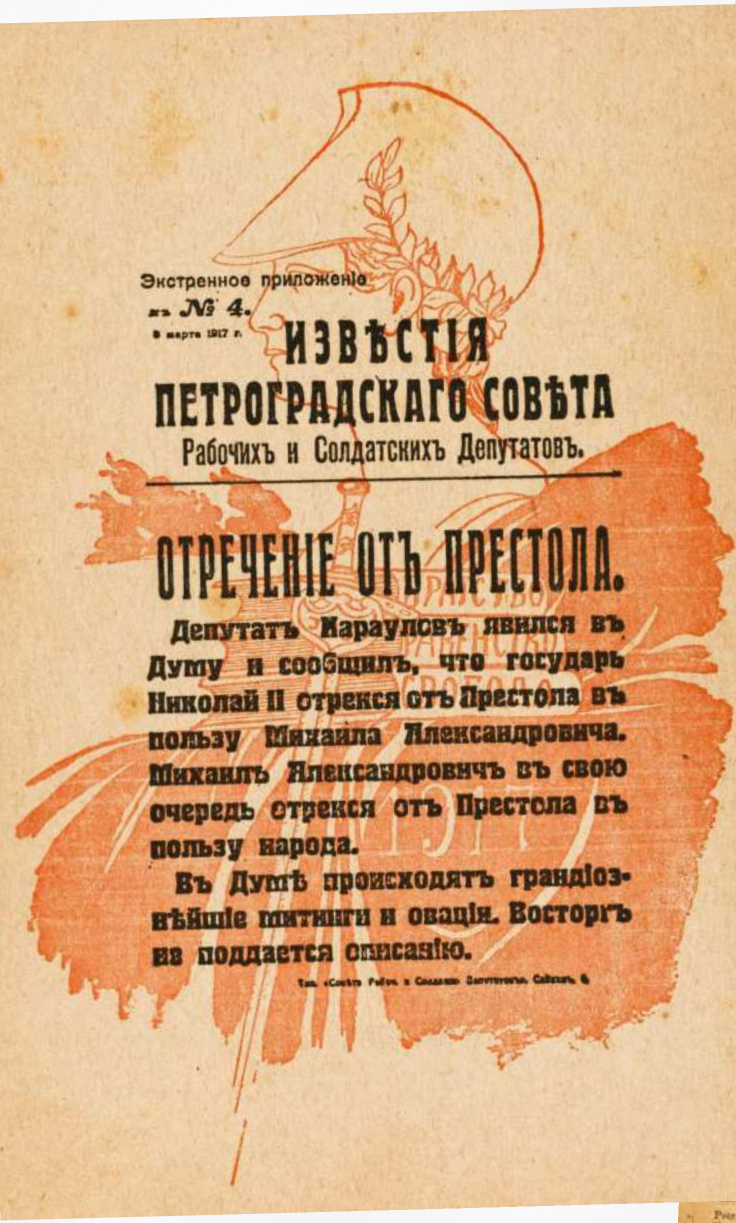


Nadezhda Ivanova-Vasilyeva, a Russian Anastasia imposter

THE RUSSIAN ANASTASIAS

A pair of unlikely pretenders

Imperial claimants were not merely a Western phenomenon: more than a dozen 'Anastasias' appeared in Russia, including Nadezhda Ivanova-Vasilyeva and Natalya Bilikhodze. After Ivanova-Vasilyeva surfaced in 1934, Moscow authorities arrested her as "a counter-revolutionary." She managed to send letters to King George V revealing her "identity" before being locked away in an asylum as "a mentally sick person representing a danger to society." Doctors examined her and found that she bore numerous scars from bullet wounds but, aside from this and the fact that she spoke French and German, there was nothing to substantiate her claim. She died, still incarcerated, in 1971 and was buried in an unmarked grave. Rather more startling was the 2002 appearance of Natalya Bilikhodze, who claimed to be a 101-year-old Anastasia, rescued by White Army officers from Ekaterinburg. A Moscow press conference, covered by international media, declared that 22 studies in Germany and Japan, including handwriting analysis, photographic comparisons and DNA profiling, had matched Bilikhodze to Anastasia: the results to be released shortly. Bilikhodze announced that as soon as she was recognised, she would give the Russian government the 2 trillion dollars she claimed Nicholas II had deposited in foreign banks. None of the promised test results were ever released, and Bilikhodze died in obscurity a short while later.



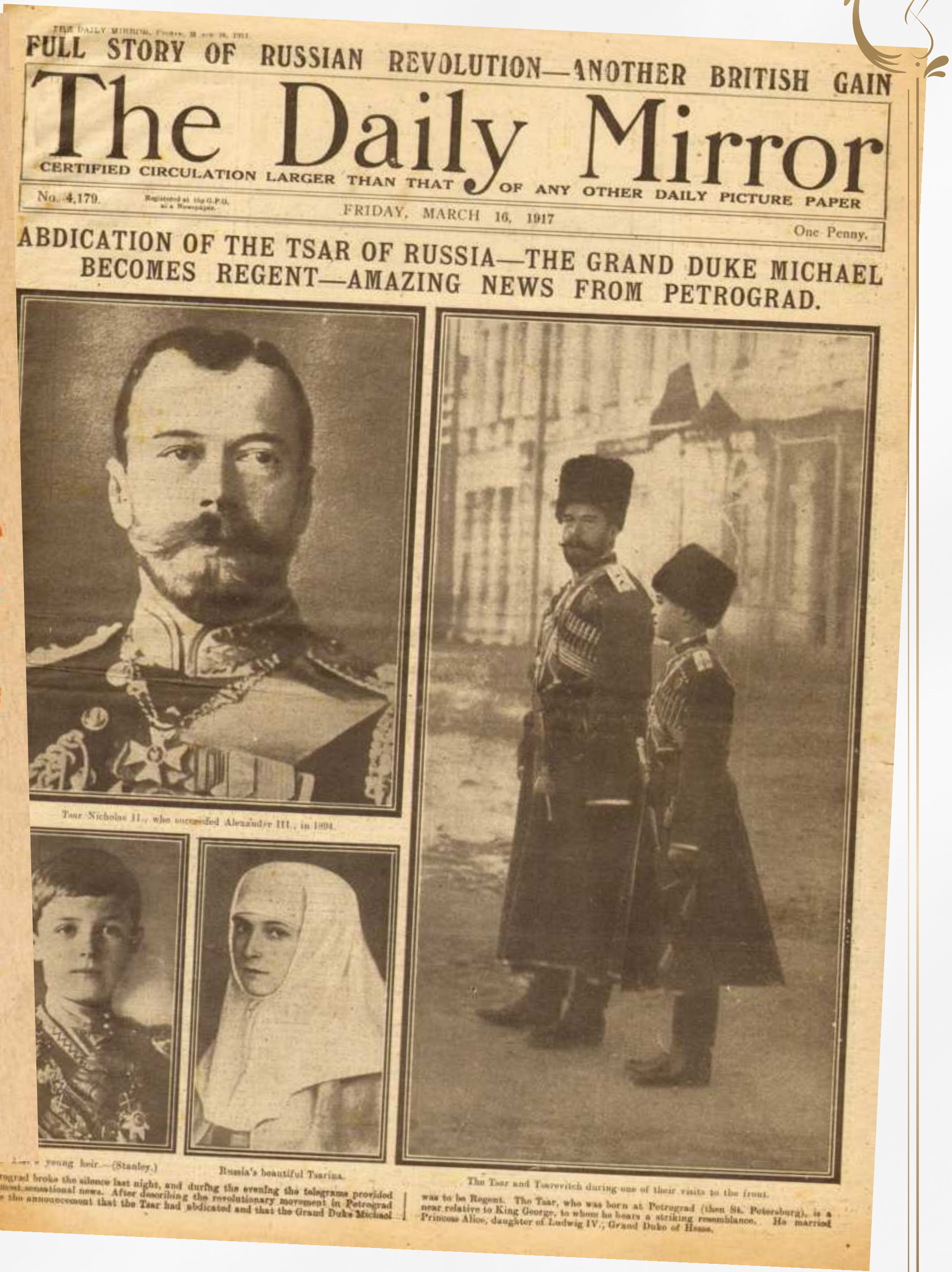
Экстренное приложеніе
къ № 4.

ИЗВѢСТІЯ
ПЕТРОГРАДСКАГО СОВѢТА
Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ.

ОТРЕЧЕНІЕ ОТЪ ПРЕСТОЛА.

Депутатъ Караулсвъ явился въ Думу и сообщилъ, что государь Николай II отрекся отъ Престола въ пользу Михаила Александровича. Михаилъ Александровичъ въ свою очередь отрекся отъ Престола въ пользу народа.

Въ Думѣ происходятъ грандіознѣйшіе митинги и оваціи. Восторгъ не поддается описанію.



FULL STORY OF RUSSIAN REVOLUTION—ANOTHER BRITISH GAIN

The Daily Mirror

CERTIFIED CIRCULATION LARGER THAN THAT OF ANY OTHER DAILY PICTURE PAPER

No. 4,179. FRIDAY, MARCH 16, 1917 One Penny.

ABDICATION OF THE TSAR OF RUSSIA—THE GRAND DUKE MICHAEL BECOMES REGENT—AMAZING NEWS FROM PETROGRAD.

Tsar Nicholas II., who succeeded Alexander III., in 1894.

young heir.—(Stanley.)

Russia's beautiful Tsarina.

The Tsar and Tsarevitch during one of their visits to the front.

Petrograd broke the silence last night, and during the evening the telegrams provided the most sensational news. After describing the revolutionary movement in Petrograd came the announcement that the Tsar had abdicated and that the Grand Duke Michael was to be Regent. The Tsar, who was born at Petrograd (then St. Petersburg), is a near relative to King George, to whom he bears a striking resemblance. He married Princess Alice, daughter of Ludwig IV., Grand Duke of Hesse.

In March 1917, Tsar Nicholas II announced his abdication, naming his brother Michael as his successor

> "Stories filtered out that the Bolsheviks had searched for a missing Grand Duchess"

New York as a guest of Anastasia's cousin, Princess Xenia of Russia. The claimant's haughty manners, blue eyes, and an "intuitive impression of a family resemblance" impressed Xenia, but she found her a difficult guest and, after several months, the claimant moved in with a New York society dowager. Her erratic behaviour and excessive spending led to an ugly scene, with a hysterical Tchaikovsky dragged to an asylum. Soon, she was on her way back to Germany.

After the 1928 death of Nicholas II's mother, 12 Romanov relatives had denounced Anastasia Tchaikovsky as a fraud. A decade later, and now using the name 'Anna Anderson', the claimant took her case to court. At the start of World War I, a Berlin bank had frozen an account belonging to the Tsar Nicholas II; in 1933, what little remained was divided between Nicholas II's surviving relatives, and Anderson's lawyers contested the distribution. The court case, which began in 1938 and continued until 1970 with various interruptions, became the longest running lawsuit in German history. Lord Mountbatten, the real Anastasia's first cousin, paid for much of the defence offered by his royal relatives in Empress Alexandra's homeland of Hesse. The trials, like so much of the Anastasia Case, devolved into frustrating accusations and battles between warring witnesses. For every anthropologist or handwriting expert who insisted that Anderson was the grand duchess, the defence countered with opposing opinions. Anderson herself largely refused to co-operate with her attorneys. "You either believe it or you don't believe it," she once said. "It doesn't matter." To many this attitude only added credence to her claim - after all, what imposter would be so garrulous and unco-operative?

WHO WAS EUGENIA SMITH?

The aged rival to Anna Anderson's claim

An autumn 1963 cover story in *Life* magazine announced, "The Case of a New Anastasia." Declaring that she was really the grand duchess, Eugenia Smith of Chicago appeared out of nowhere, promoting the release of her purported memoirs. Like Anderson, she too claimed that a sympathetic guard had rescued her from the Ekaterinburg massacre and taken her to Europe.

According to a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agent, she passed several polygraph tests, though anthropologists and handwriting experts undermined her claim, as did Princess Nina Chavchavadze, the real Anastasia's cousin, who met Smith and declared her a fraud. "The whole face is wrong," the princess insisted. "Everything, the nose, the ears, the mouth, is too small. The Russian accent is not at all right. When I wanted to talk about our childhood, she said that I must understand that she has a terrible memory for such things."

The claim turned bizarre when Smith met with a former Polish agent, Colonel Michael Goloniewski, who claimed that he was the princess's brother Alexei, in 1963. At their meeting, the pair "recognised" each other as their missing sibling (however, the two later fell out and repudiated their mutual "recognitions"). It didn't take long for researchers to learn that Smith had been born Eugenia Drabek in 1899 in Bukovina.

Anna Anderson was furious at these 'revelations': Eugenia Smith, she insisted, was nothing but "a creature of Mountbatten," meant to undermine her own claim. Nonetheless, Smith attracted a handful of supporters, who thought her polished manner more in keeping with the behaviour and mannerisms of a real grand duchess, over Anderson's erratic conduct.

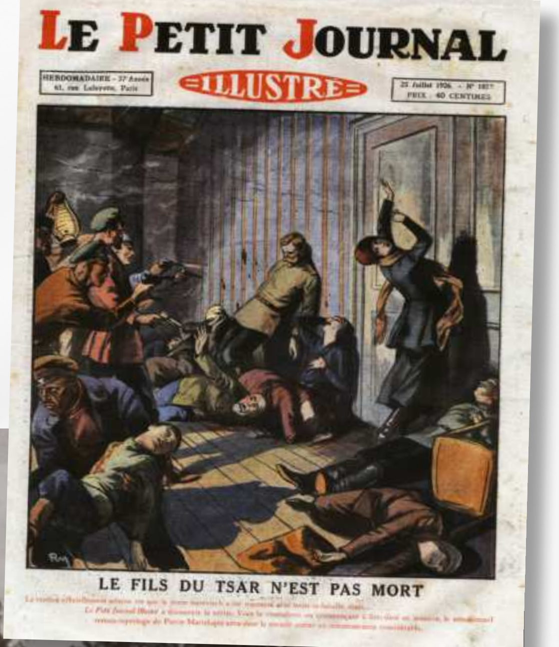
Smith refused to submit to DNA testing after the Romanov remains were found in 1991, and she died in Rhode Island six years later, having never abandoned her claim that she was the lost Princess Anastasia.

"PEOPLE WANTED TO BELIEVE THAT, SOMEHOW, ANASTASIA HAD ESCAPED THE TERRIBLE MASSACRE OF HER FAMILY"

By the mid-1950s Anderson was living in the Black Forest in Germany, but obscurity eluded her. The 1956 film based on her story, *Anastasia*, not only won actress Ingrid Bergman an Academy Award, but also brought bus loads of tourists, who climbed fences surrounding the claimant's little house and shouted for her to appear. Magazines and newspapers around the world turned her into a celebrity with their evocative tales of a lost princess, of a modern-day fairy tale gone tragically wrong. People wanted to believe that, somehow, Anastasia had escaped the terrible massacre of her family. When the legal decision finally came in 1970, it satisfied no-one. Anderson hadn't proved that she was Anastasia; on the other hand, the West German Supreme Court declared that there was no conclusive proof that the real grand duchess had died in 1918.

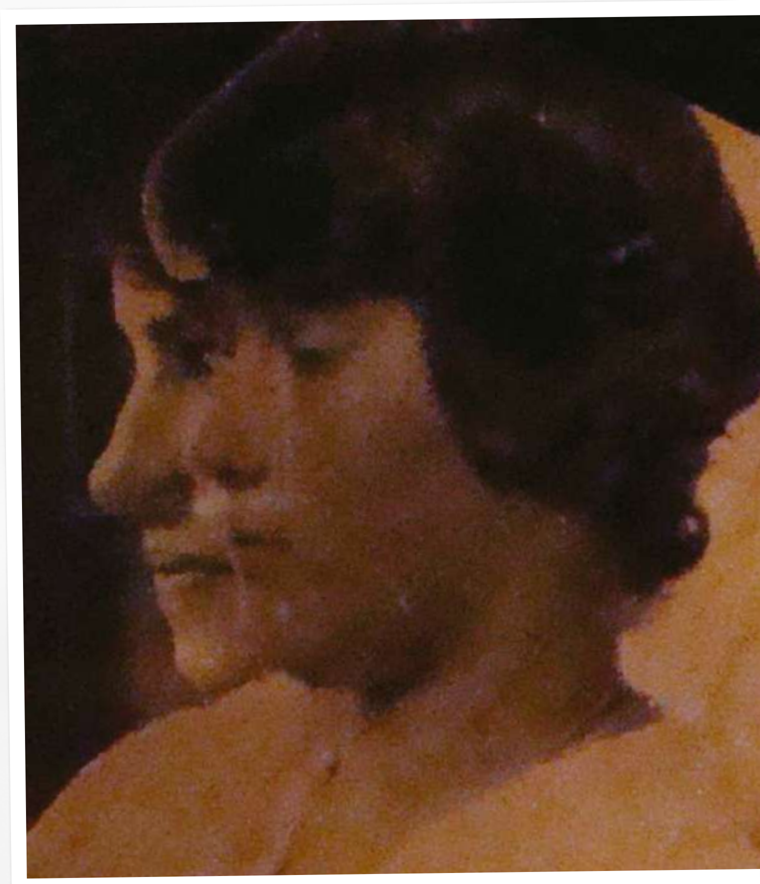
By this time, Anderson had left Germany for good. In 1968, Gleb Botkin had again brought her to the United States and introduced her to wealthy retired history professor Jack Manahan. Anderson liked the USA, especially the university town of Charlottesville, Virginia, where both Botkin and Manahan lived. On 23 December 1968, she and Manahan were married, with Botkin looking on as best man; the professor proudly called himself the "son-in-law to the tsar."

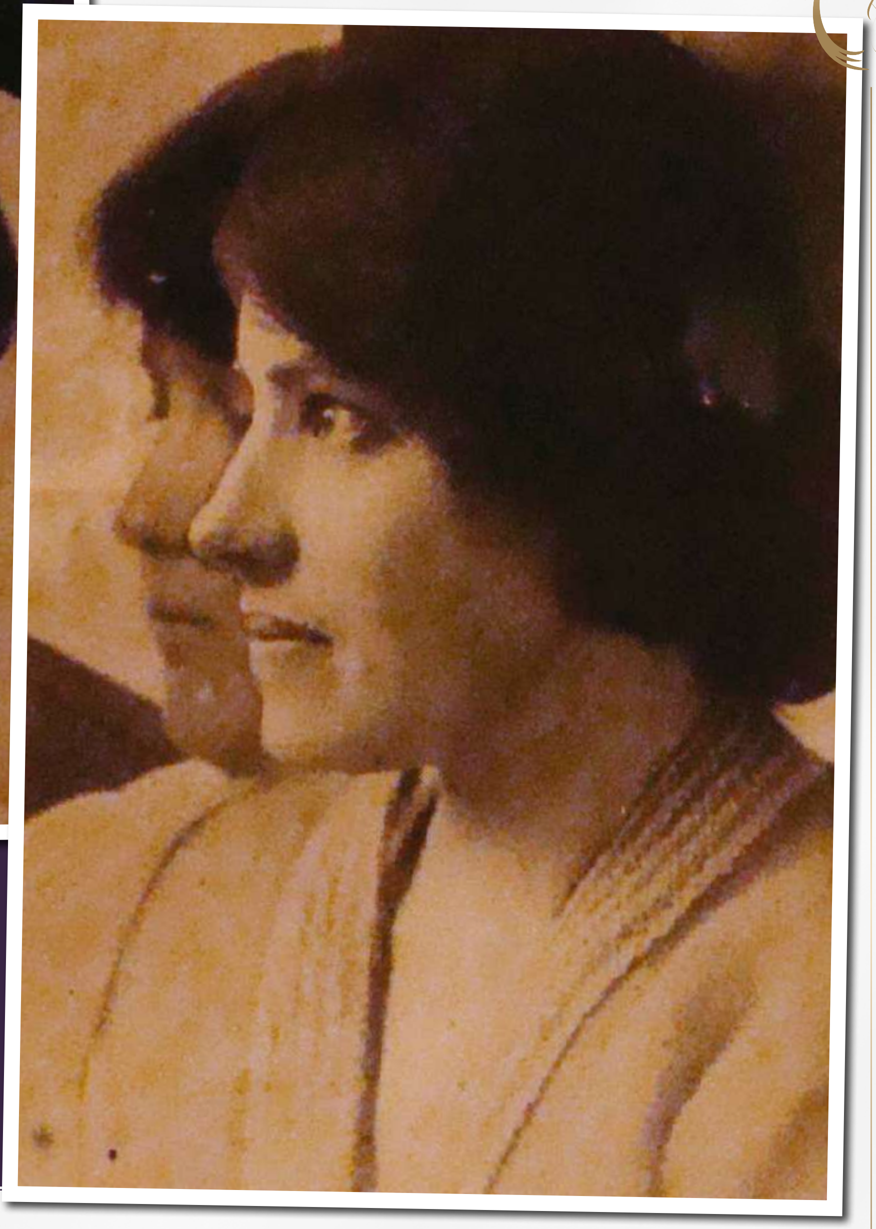
For a time, the highly eccentric Manahans became popular figures in Charlottesville. The diminutive 'grand duchess' made regular appearances at a posh country club attired in plaid



Published in July 1926, a French journal reconstructs the execution of the Romanovs with a sensationalist caption stating, "The tsar's son is not dead"

Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg, where the Romanovs were executed in July 1918





ANASTASIA AND HER IMPOSTER

Initially duped by Anna Anderson, Pierre Gilliard later became the strongest voice against the grand duchess' imposter, going so far as to publish a book entitled *La Fausse Anastasie* (*The False Anastasia*). In his book, he featured his 1927 photographic tests of the two women. He superimposed the face of Anastasia (taken from a photograph during his time as her tutor) above the face of Anna Anderson and vice versa in an attempt to compare the physical features of the face. His conclusion was that there were too many differences – the two women simply couldn't be the same person. For the rest of his life, he denounced Anna Anderson as a fraud, stealing the identity of Anastasia.

trousers, red plastic raincoats and yellow hats, though her questionable table manners and loud arguments with her husband in a string of broken English and German unnerved sophisticates. More and more, the Manahans retreated to a once-elegant house, where they lived surrounded by piles of garbage, rotting vegetables and a horde of inbred cats and dogs. Reporters and writers still called on this most famous of royal claimants. In 1983, when author Peter Kurth published his biography of Anderson, the evidence put forth in her favour seemed overwhelming. For much of the public, she had become Anastasia. This was how she was largely remembered by the world when, on 12 February 1984, she died of pneumonia at the presumed age of 82.

Anderson's claim, or so it seemed, was destined to remain an enigma. Then, in 1989, the Russian government revealed that Yakov Yurovsky, the commandant of the Ipatiev House who led the execution, left several accounts detailing the shooting and disposal of the bodies. When the truck carrying the corpses broke down in the Koptyaki Forest, he said, they had burned the remains of Alexei and one of his sisters and buried them apart from the other nine victims. Two years later, the mass grave was exhumed. British and American experts were able to match DNA from four of the skeletal remains to a sample donated by the Duke of Edinburgh, whose grandmother was Empress Alexandra's sister, while Romanov relatives proved a match to the bones belonging to Nicholas II. But rather than end the story, the exhumation only fed imaginations: two bodies were still missing, those of the haemophiliac heir Alexei and one of his sisters. Despite searches, investigations failed to find the second grave Yurovsky described. Perhaps hoping to put an end to stories of survival, Russian scientists – using photographic comparisons – insisted that Anastasia's body had been found and that Grand Duchess Maria was missing. American experts, though, said the development of the teeth, the sacrum and bones indicated that Anastasia was not in the mass grave.

Had Anderson really been Anastasia? With DNA available, scientists set out to solve the mystery. Anderson's body had been cremated, but a small portion of her intestine had been removed in 1979 and stored in a Charlottesville hospital. Locks of her hair had also been saved, allowing for a genetic comparison with the Romanov remains. The results were startling: Anderson did not match the DNA of the exhumed remains or Romanov relatives. She couldn't possibly have been Grand Duchess Anastasia.

But if not Anastasia, who had she been? Since the late 1920s, her opponents had suggested that she was really Franziska Schanzkowska, a young German factory worker from West Prussia in what is modern-day Poland who had gone missing in Berlin just days before

A portrait of Anna taken in 1929 when she was living in the USA

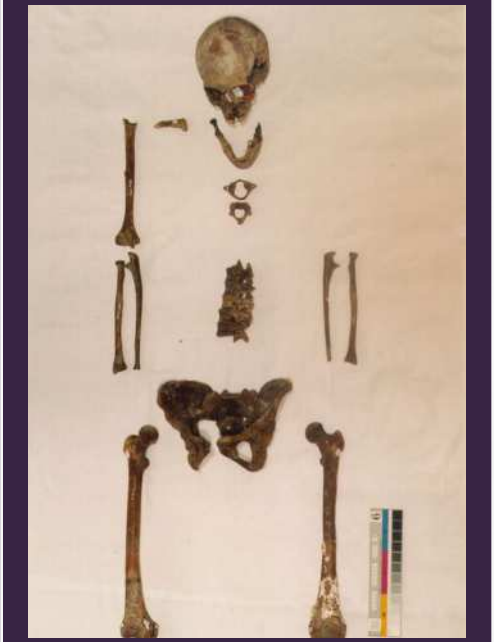
police pulled Anderson from a canal. Scientists obtained a blood sample from Schanzkowska's great-nephew Karl Maucher and tested it against the intestine and hair profiles. The results matched: the most famous royal claimant had actually been a provincial farm girl.

This identification did little to resolve the mystery. How, people wondered, could an uneducated peasant pass herself off to a host of royals and aristocrats as a genuine Russian grand duchess? What of the matching scars, the hallux valgus of the feet, the same blue eyes, the volumes of apparent memories that had convinced so many? The truth was, in its way, as astonishing as any tale of miraculous survival: Franziska Schanzkowska's decades-long charade reveals her as a woman of considerable abilities, talent and cunning, every bit as remarkable as the princess whose identity she claimed.

Born in 1896 into a formerly ennobled family that had fallen on hard times, Franziska had been a bright, intelligent child who spoke three languages and excelled in her studies, not the uneducated peasant often described by history. An unhappy home life, with an alcoholic father and abusive mother, led her to dream of better things. Friends in her native village of Hygendorf remembered how she "displayed pretentious manners." At 17, she'd moved to Berlin and got a job in a munitions factory. On 22 August 1916, she dropped a grenade: a foreman was killed and Franziska suffered a nervous breakdown. For the next two years she was in and out of asylums before taking a job as an agricultural worker in northern Germany alongside

THE MYSTERY SOLVED

The true fate of the Romanovs



In July 1991, Russian scientists claimed to have found Anastasia's skeleton in the mass grave near Ekaterinburg

On 17 July 1998 - the 70th anniversary of the Ekaterinburg massacre - the remains of Nicholas II, Empress Alexandra and three of their four daughters, along with the four retainers killed with them - were given a state funeral and interred in St Petersburg's Cathedral of the Fortress of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, traditional resting place of the Romanovs. Two years later, the Russian Orthodox Church canonised the imperial family as Passion Bearers. But two bodies were still missing. For 16 years, teams searched the Koptyaki Forest, looking for the second grave described by Yurovsky. Then, in August 2007, a group of historians and archaeologists located a shallow pit some 60 metres from the exhumed mass grave. Within, they discovered 48 chopped and charred bone fragments, including pieces of femurs and skulls, as well as a number of teeth. Forensic analysis showed that they had come from two separate individuals, a male between the ages of 12-15, and a female of between 15-19. Dr Michael Coble of the United States Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory conducted genetic testing. Both sets of remains were identified as having been children of Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra. Alexei had been found. But which grand duchess had finally been unearthed? Russian scientists insisted that the female remains belonged to Maria. American forensic experts again identified them as Anastasia - a controversy likely never to be resolved. Once investigations are completed, the Russian government plans to inter the remains in St Petersburg.

The Church on the Blood was built on the site of the brutal Romanov massacre

The cottage in the Black Forest, Germany, where Anna lived until 1968

Photographed here at the presumed age of 82, Anna Anderson - known at this point as Anastasia Manahan - died in 1984, at her actual age of 87

Russian prisoners of war. She picked up enough Russian to understand, if not convincingly speak, it. Then, in the autumn of 1918, one of these soldiers attacked Franziska for reasons unknown, turning his farming tools on her and leaving her with the broken jaw, loose teeth, and scars she later said she had received during the Ekaterinburg massacre.

For the next 15 months, Franziska lived with Anna Wingender and her daughter Doris at their Berlin flat, depressed and complaining about her aching head and teeth. "She was always talking about how she wanted to be someone grand," Anna recalled. Franziska rarely left the apartment. She spent her days in bed, reading romance novels - at least until she disappeared in the third week of February 1920. The Wingenders had no idea what had become of her until 1927, when they saw Franziska's photograph in newspapers reporting 'Anastasia's' survival. An editor put them in touch with Martin Knopf, a private detective hired by Empress Alexandra's brother, Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig of Hesse, who soon tracked down Franziska's mother Marianna and younger sister Maria Juliana in Hygendorf. Both identified the claimant as their missing daughter, as did Franziska's former village friends.

When confronted with the claimant face to face, Doris Wingender readily recognised her mother's lodger; Franziska's younger brother, Felix, too identified his sister, although he quickly recanted, fearing his family would be held liable for her fraud. A decade later, the Nazi government arranged another confrontation between Franziska and her family. Her sister Gertrude immediately recognised Franziska, but after a hasty conference, her siblings convinced her not to sign a statement. Felix had earlier lied to protect his mother from a possible lawsuit; now, the family had to protect Felix from the same concerns.

Amazingly, Anderson's supporters dismissed her identification as Franziska, insisting that it was nothing but a fairy tale cooked up by her opponents. This was the power of desire, and it fed the myth she made seem so believable. Franziska used this desire to further her claim, to play upon the hopes of those enchanted with this tragic tale. She read voraciously, studied royal postcards, took lessons in English, and engaged in a delicate and dangerous dance for 60 years, unwilling to press her claim for fear of exposure. "Who I am and who I pretend to be," she once said in an unguarded moment.

That the charade was so compellingly convincing was testament to her undoubted abilities. Anastasia may have died in 1918, but through Franziska she lived on to become the most famous Russian princess in history.

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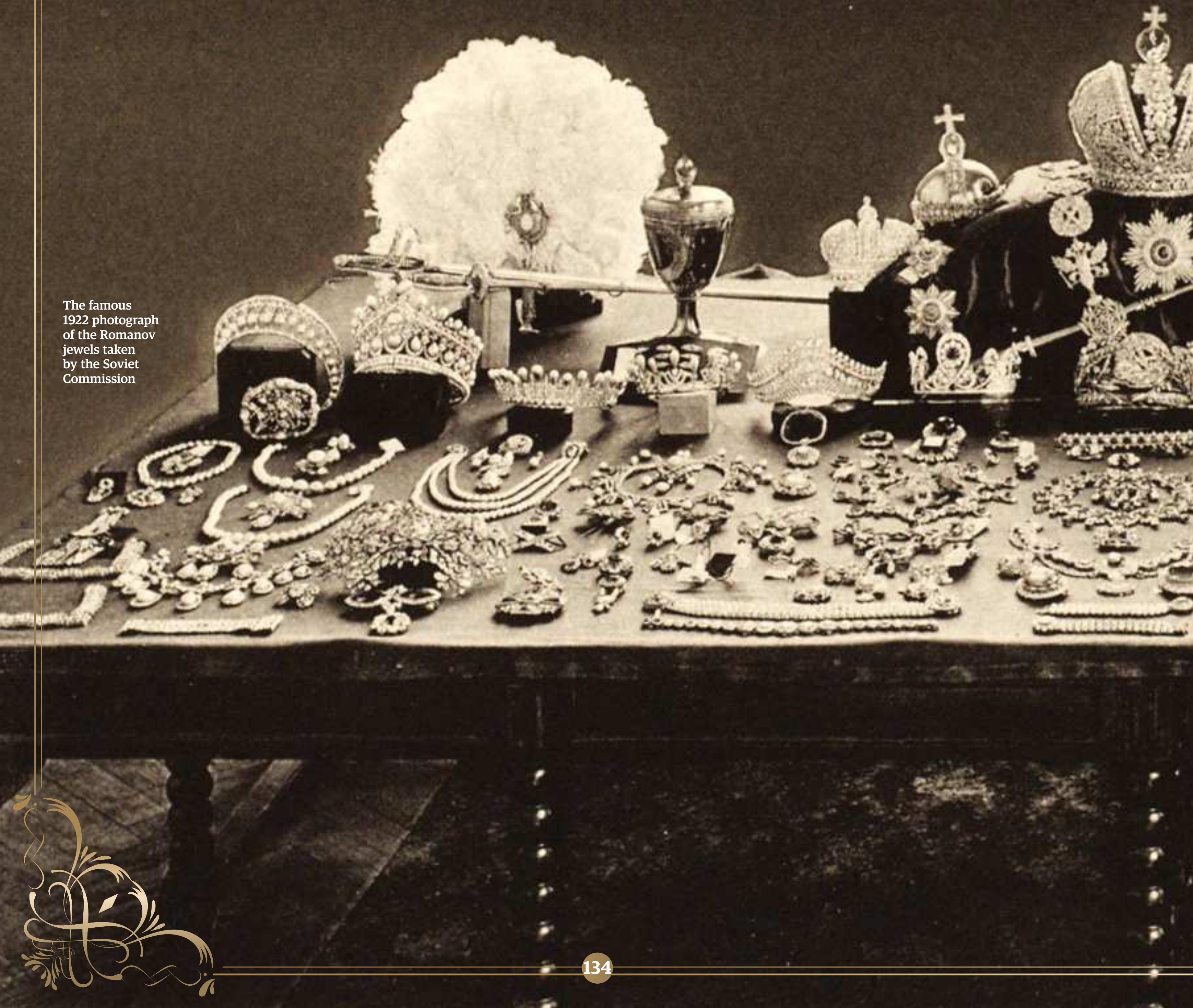
FROM RUSSIA WITH LOOT

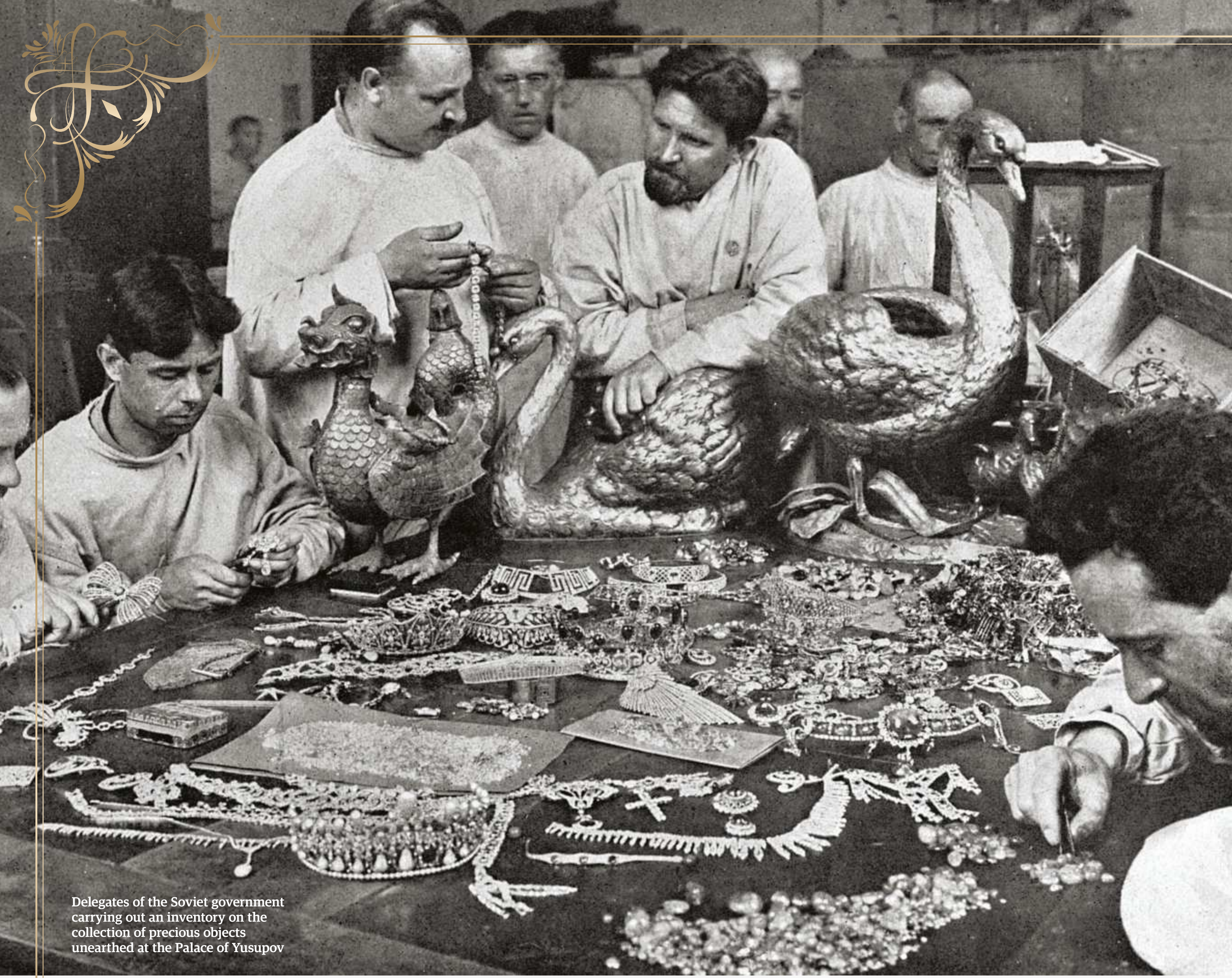
The Romanovs were the wealthiest dynasty in the world in 1914, so what happened to their riches after the revolution?

Words **Penny Wilson**



The famous 1922 photograph of the Romanov jewels taken by the Soviet Commission

“PETER THE GREAT HAD ESTABLISHED THE DIAMOND FUND, INTENDED TO BELONG TO THE ROMANOV DYNASTY IN PERPETUITY AND FORBIDDEN TO BE SOLD, GIVEN AWAY OR ALTERED”



Delegates of the Soviet government carrying out an inventory on the collection of precious objects unearthed at the Palace of Yusupov

When the last emperor of Russia, Nicholas II, led his country into WWI in 1914, he was at the head of the wealthiest family in the world. Reigning for 300 years over one-sixth of the earth's surface, the Romanovs had amassed a fortune that would be worth some $280 billion today. Less than four years later, Nicholas and his immediate family would be dead, murdered by the newly instated communist government, and the treasure would be seized by the Bolsheviks. What could be moved was broken apart, weighed, measured and sold – scattered across the world like flotsam from a great shipwreck washed up on shore, all that was left of the greatest ever royal collection.

Following his abdication, Nicholas was taken to his home at the suburban Alexander Palace as a prisoner; here, he and his family began what would be 481 days of captivity in relative comfort. The family was allowed reasonably good access to living quarters and private gardens, where they passed the time planting vegetables. The Romanovs had been hoping to depart Russia for exile in the UK, but their royal cousins, King George V and Queen Mary, refused them refuge, perhaps fearing that the Russians would bring with them the infection of revolution. Alternate foreign exile seemed equally problematic, and the chairman of the post-abdication Provisional Government, Alexander Kerensky, took the decision to send the family into internal exile at a quiet provincial town in Siberia called Tobolsk.

Kerensky knew that his own time in power was running out, much as Nicholas's had done. The Bolshevik party of Vladimir Lenin was gaining strength and power among the disparate factions in a Russia where revolutionary fervour still seethed and threatened – and Lenin was much less well-disposed towards former imperial personages than he was the Provisional Government. Kerensky knew that once Lenin had overthrown the Provisional Government, he would take aim at the exiled Romanovs.

So, on 31 July 1917, the last imperial family gathered in a large, semi-circular hallway in

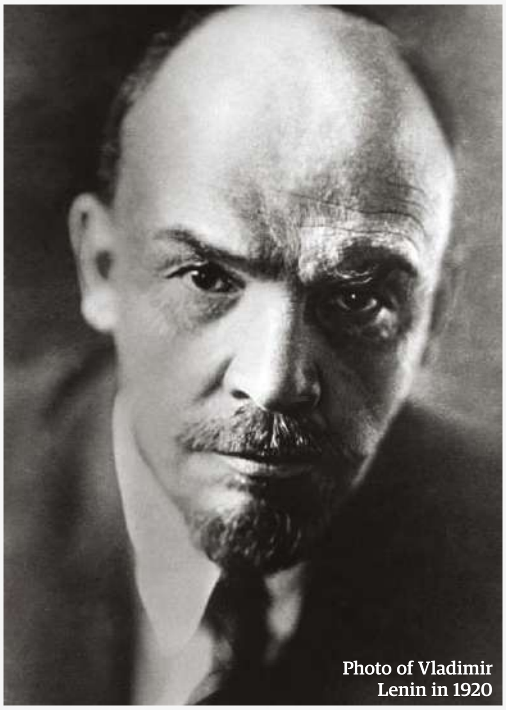
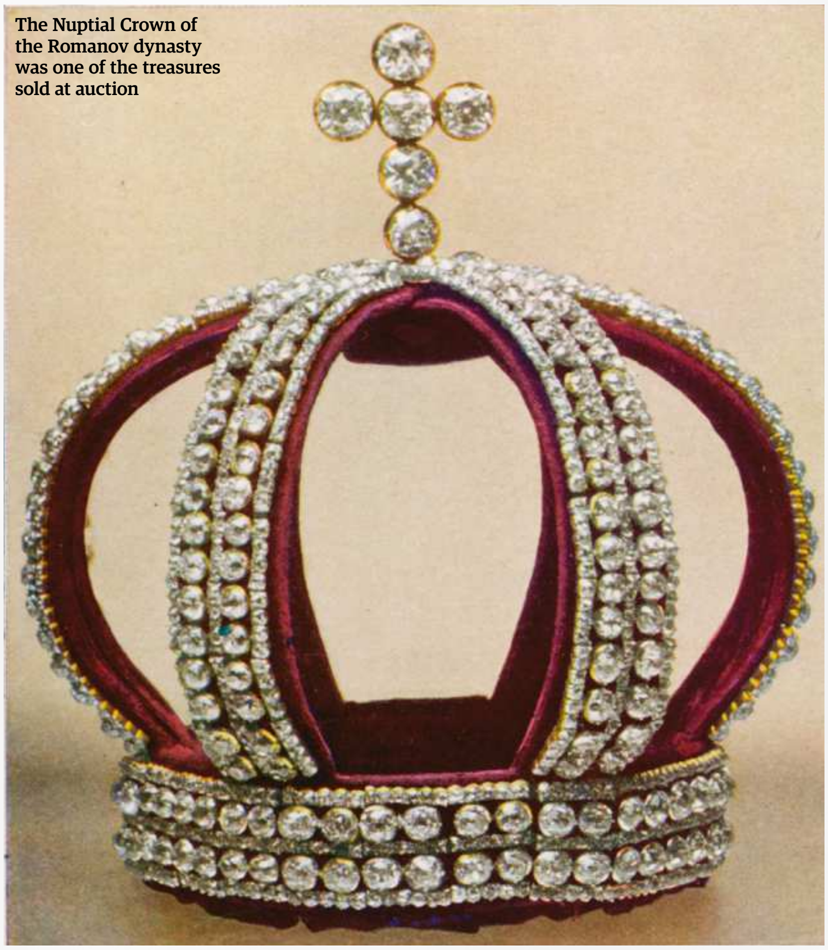


Photo of Vladimir Lenin in 1920



The Nuptial Crown of the Romanov dynasty was one of the treasures sold at auction

Alexander Palace to await the automobiles that would take them the short distance from their home to their private railway station, where they would embark on a train bearing the flags and insignia of the Japanese branch of the Red Cross. They waited in growing anxiety through the night until around 5am, when their cars appeared. They left their house with 42 faithful friends and retainers - many of who would die for their loyalty - and 50 large packing cases containing clothes, books, household supplies, medications, china and glassware, silver and gold plates and a massive amount of personal jewellery belonging to the former empress and the four young grand duchesses, as well as ceremonial swords and court jewellery and trinkets. The children's English tutor, Sidney Gibbes, guessed that the value of the jewellery was well in excess of 1 million roubles. Gibbes's guess was conservative: the value of the treasure taken east into exile by the Romanov family totalled 2.8 million roubles in value in 1917 (in modern standards, that totals about £14.7 million or $18.5 million).

Despite the staggering amount of treasure that the imperial family took into exile in their luggage, they also left behind an incredible wealth in palaces, furniture, works of art and even more jewels and jewellery.

During his reign, Peter the Great had established the Diamond Fund, which was a delegated collection of crowns, sceptres, orbs, diadems, tiaras, necklaces, bracelets and other adornments intended to belong to the Romanov dynasty in perpetuity and forbidden to be sold, given away or altered. Additionally, each succeeding emperor or empress was expected to add to the fund, which meant that by WWI, there was an almost incalculable wealth of the jeweller's art in the Diamond Fund, including examples in various styles such as rococo and neo-gothic, as well as several famous stones like Caesar's Ruby and a piece believed to have been cut from the legendary Hope Diamond. These imperial treasures were stored in a safe room in the Winter Palace, but as a precautionary measure, the entire Diamond Fund was ordered to be removed, and was sent by train to Moscow, where it was installed in vaults beneath the Kremlin for safe-keeping for the duration of the war. There it stayed until 1926, when the cache was discovered by the Bolsheviks. The collection was taken out, cleaned, photographed and catalogued before being divided up. Part of the collection - the larger, more historically and nationally significant pieces including the coronation regalia - were kept in the Kremlin, where they finally went on display in 1967. They remain there today, and can be seen by visitors to the Armoury Museum and the Diamond Fund.

The other part of the Diamond Fund, which amounted to almost 70 per cent of the collection, was allocated for sale. Through a consortium of British dealers, most of these items were sold at auction at Christie's. They were offered in 124 lots on 16 March 1927, but each lot may have included pairs or sets of items. A sword with a hilt and guard entirely encrusted with brilliants and previously belonging to Emperor Paul was auctioned, and so was a diamond tiara in the form of wheat-sheafs with foliage, which had once been a favourite of Paul's wife and which was donated to the Fund at the time of her death. The whereabouts of many of these items is unknown,

> "BY WWI, THERE WAS AN ALMOST INCALCULABLE WEALTH OF THE JEWELLER'S ART IN THE DIAMOND FUND"

THE LOST IMPERIAL FABERGÉ EGGS

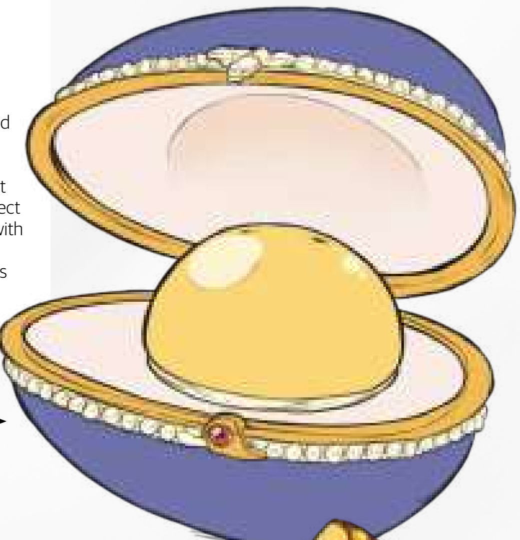
Somewhere across the world, seven are waiting to be found

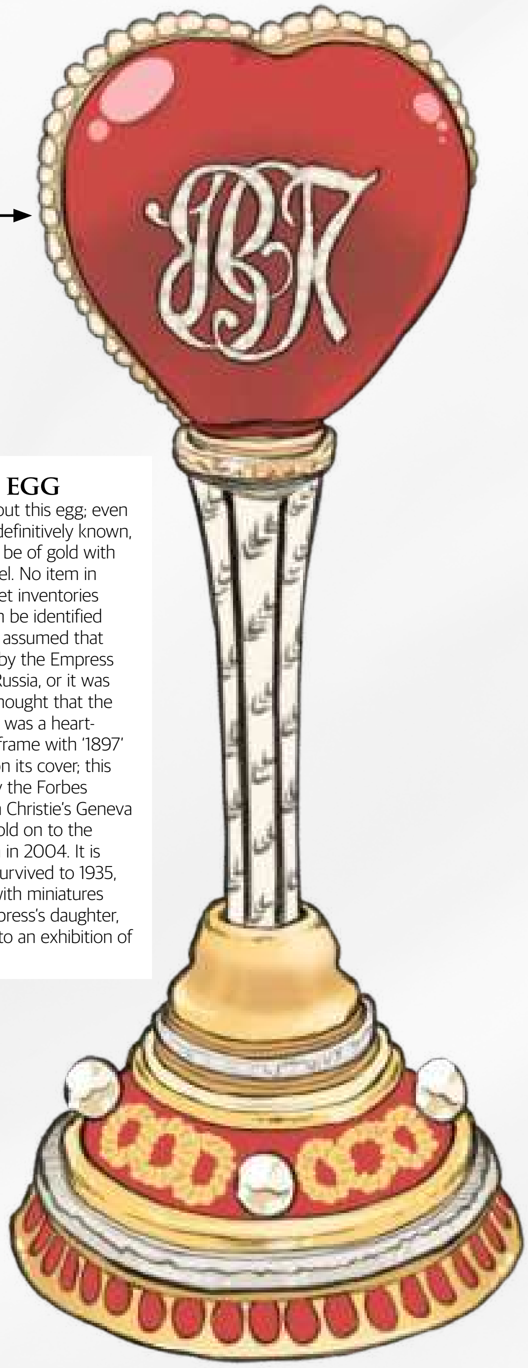
There are few collections of art so associated with a dynasty as the imperial Fabergé eggs are associated with the Romanovs. Of the 50 completed eggs, the whereabouts of 43 are known, though some were missing for years. Seven imperial eggs are missing. Most of them are from the early years of the series; quite possibly, as their designs are much simpler than the later eggs, they may not have received the same attention as the more elaborate and decorative eggs, and may have been sold on as mere trinkets.

All seven of the missing eggs are from the collection of the Empress Maria Feodorovna.

1886: HEN EGG WITH SAPPHIRE PENDANT

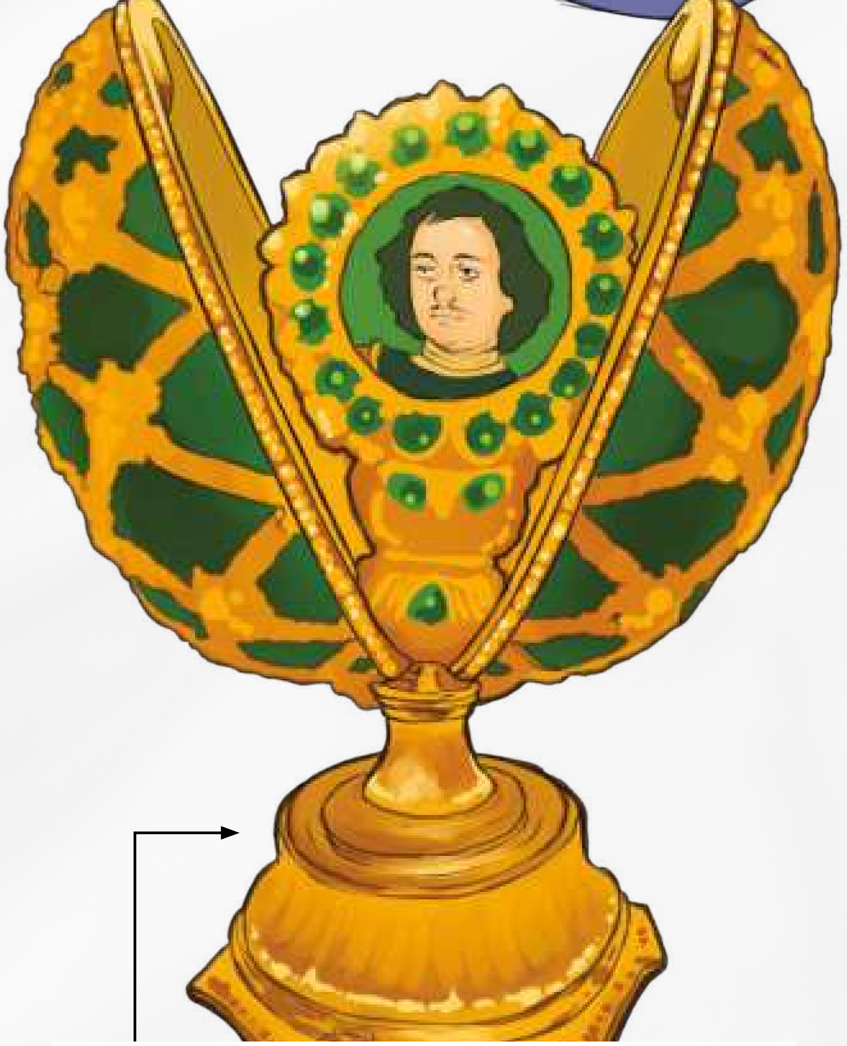
This object is described as a gold hen, dotted with rose-cut diamonds, picking a sapphire egg pendant out of a jewelled basket. As a gift from her husband, Alexander III, no doubt the Empress treasured this egg and it is known that it survived the Revolution. In 1922, an object described as "one silver hen, speckled with rose-cut diamonds, on gold stand" was taken to the Sovnarkom salesrooms. It is possible that this is the hen separated from its egg.





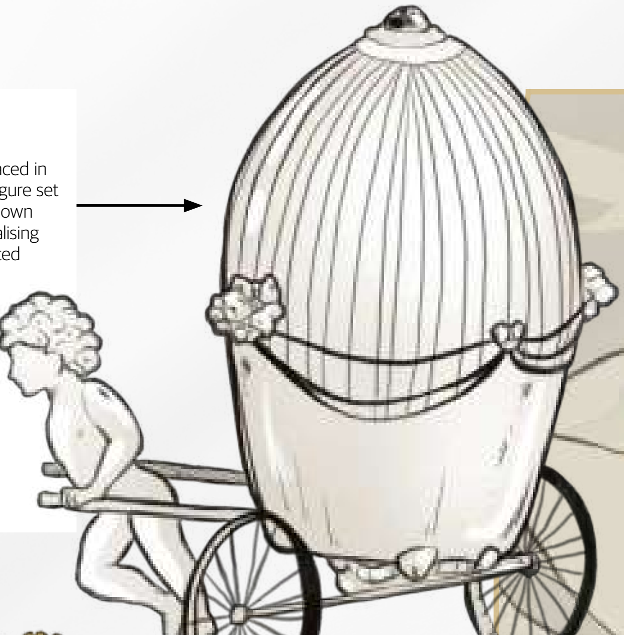
1897: MAUVE EGG

Very little is known about this egg; even its composition is not definitively known, though it is thought to be of gold with mauve-coloured enamel. No item in the 1917 and 1922 Soviet inventories of imperial treasure can be identified as this egg, and so it is assumed that it was either removed by the Empress herself when she left Russia, or it was lost prior to 1917. It is thought that the surprise inside this egg was a heart-shaped trefoil portrait frame with '1897' outlined in diamonds on its cover; this item was purchased by the Forbes Collection in 1978 from Christie's Geneva salesrooms, and was sold on to the Vekselberg Foundation in 2004. It is possible that the egg survived to 1935, when an 'Easter egg' with miniatures was loaned by the Empress's daughter, Grand Duchess Xenia, to an exhibition of Russian art in London.



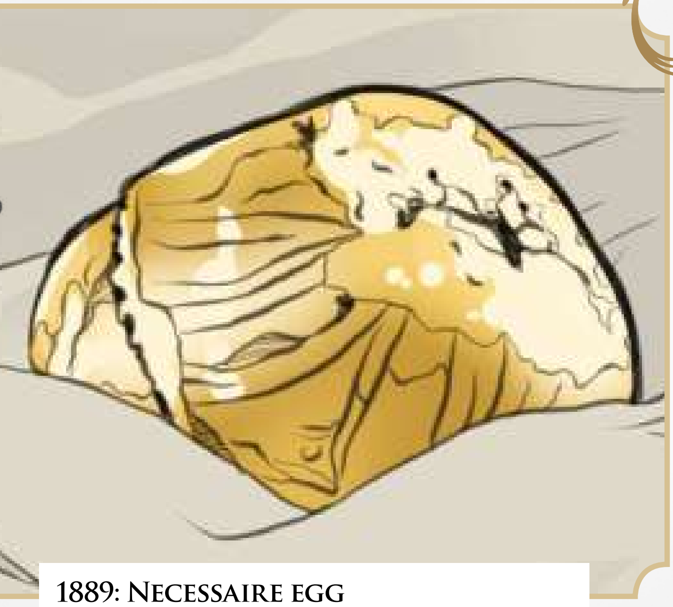
1902: EMPIRE NEPHRITE EGG

Even less is known about this egg than there is about the Mauve egg. It is though to have been made in the Empire Style, and to have been composed of gold, diamonds, nephrite and either ivory or mother of pearl. The surprise is also unidentified, though it seems possible that a miniature portrait of Alexander III, framed in nephrite, and in the possession of the Dowager's daughter, Grand Duchess Xenia, in the 1950s is a good candidate. A sensational 2004 publication suggests that the egg may have been found, but although the claim was supported and its presentation edited by Fabergé expert Alexander von Solodkoff, the majority of Fabergé scholars remain unconvinced. A more recent piece of news that may reference this egg is the 2015 discovery of an inventory drawn up by the Empress's staff in 1917 of her personal items stored at Gatchina Palace. This list mentions an egg "in gold mount on two columns from nephrite" containing inside miniature portraits of the Empress's daughter Grand Duchess Olga and the Grand Duchess's first husband, Prince Peter of Oldenburg.



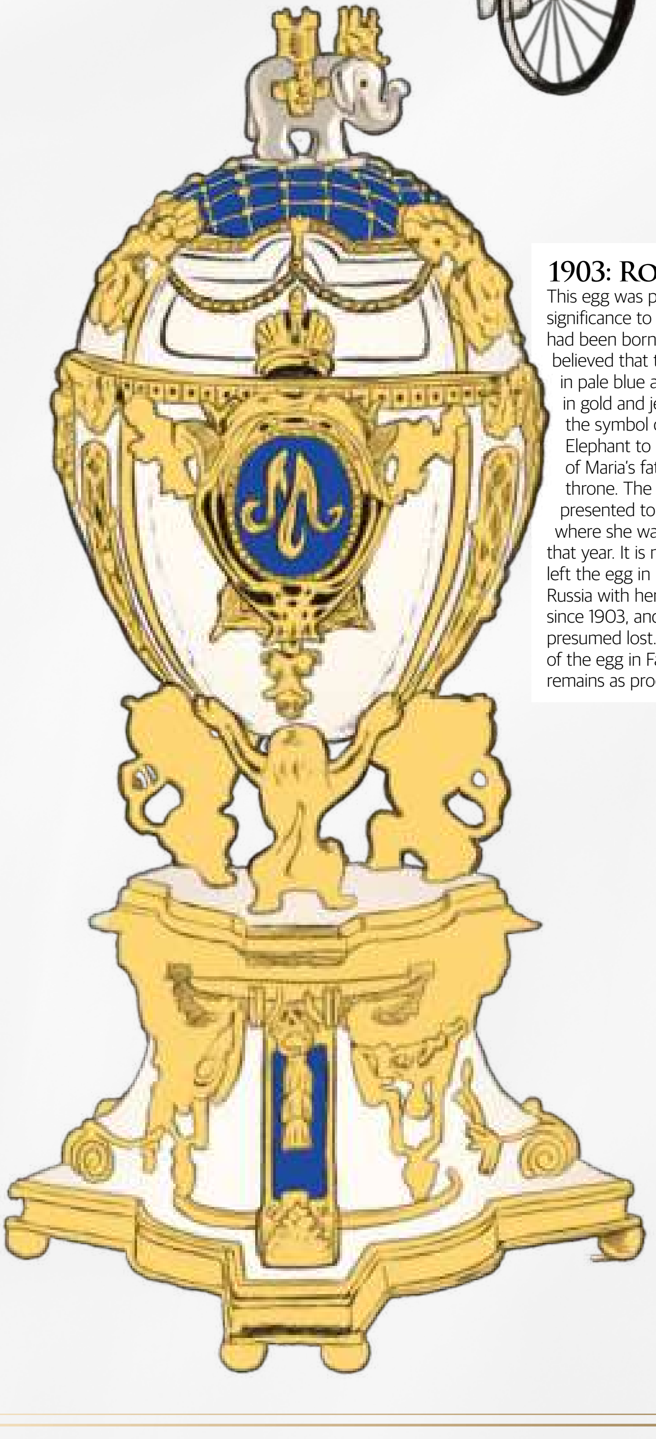
1888: CHERUB WITH CHARIOT EGG

This creation is a small, silver egg placed in a silver 'chariot' with a silver Cupid figure set between the shafts. There is one known semi-photograph of this egg; a tantalising glimpse of the missing object reflected in the glass of a vitrine at a Saint Petersburg exposition in 1902. It almost certainly was sold to Armand Hammer in the 1930s, and was sold on to a Mrs Ethel Gunton Douglas in New York in 1934. The egg was sold by Mrs Douglas's estate through an auction house in 1941 to an unknown buyer as part of a lot of two silver items for the sum of $22.50.



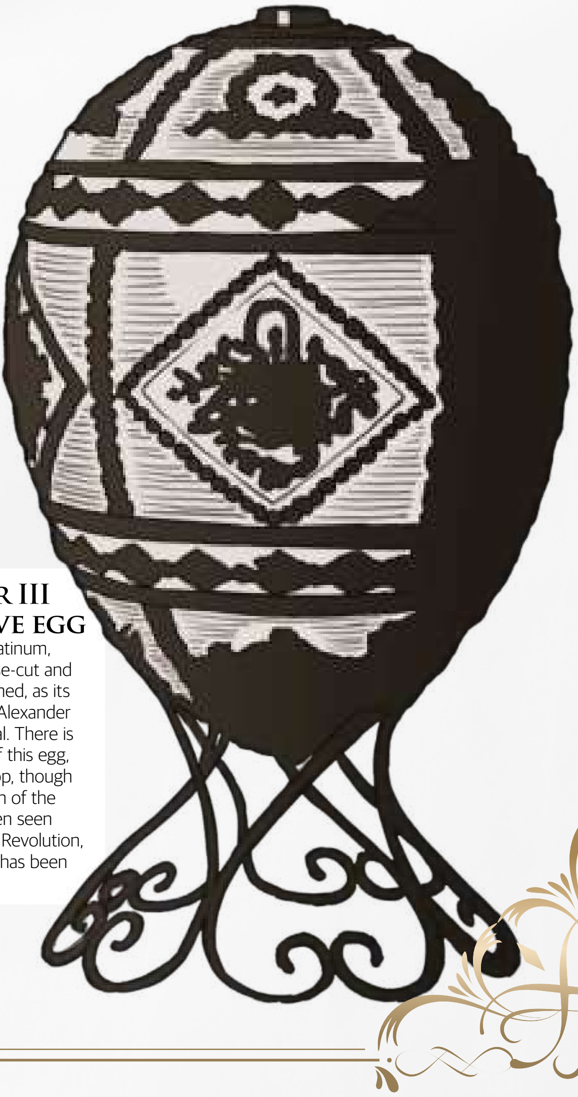
1889: NECESSAIRE EGG

This egg – of gold, diamonds, rubies, emeralds and a single cabochon sapphire – contained a 13-piece manicure set. It can be traced from Gatchina Palace, where it fell into Soviet hands, to the Sovnarkom salesrooms sometime after 1922, where it was apparently sold into private ownership. In 1949, the egg appeared in a Fabergé display at Wartski's in London, courtesy of this anonymous owner. The object was identified as Fabergé's work, but not recognised as the missing 1889 egg. In 1952, Wartski bought this egg – still unidentified – from its anonymous owner and sold it on to another buyer who wished to remain unnamed. Wartski honoured this wish, and the new owner's name was not entered into the sales ledger. This egg has not been knowingly seen since this 1952 sale.



1903: ROYAL DANISH EGG

This egg was probably of particular significance to the Dowager Empress, who had been born a Princess of Denmark. It is believed that the egg was commissioned in pale blue and white enamel, decorated in gold and jewels and surmounted with the symbol of Denmark's Order of the Elephant to mark the 40th Anniversary of Maria's father's accession to the Danish throne. The egg was sent to Denmark and presented to Maria there, in Copenhagen, where she was passing the Easter holidays that year. It is not known if the Dowager left the egg in Denmark, or if it returned to Russia with her. This egg has not been seen since 1903, and is considered to be missing, presumed lost. A single, good photograph of the egg in Fabergé's workshop is all that remains as proof it exists.



1909: ALEXANDER III COMMEMORATIVE EGG

This egg was created from platinum, gold, white matte enamel, rose-cut and portrait diamonds and contained, as its surprise, a small gold bust of Alexander III, set on a lapis lazuli pedestal. There is a single known photograph of this egg, taken in the Fabergé workshop, though there is no known photograph of the surprise. This egg has not been seen publicly since before the 1917 Revolution, and neither it nor its surprise has been located on any inventory list.

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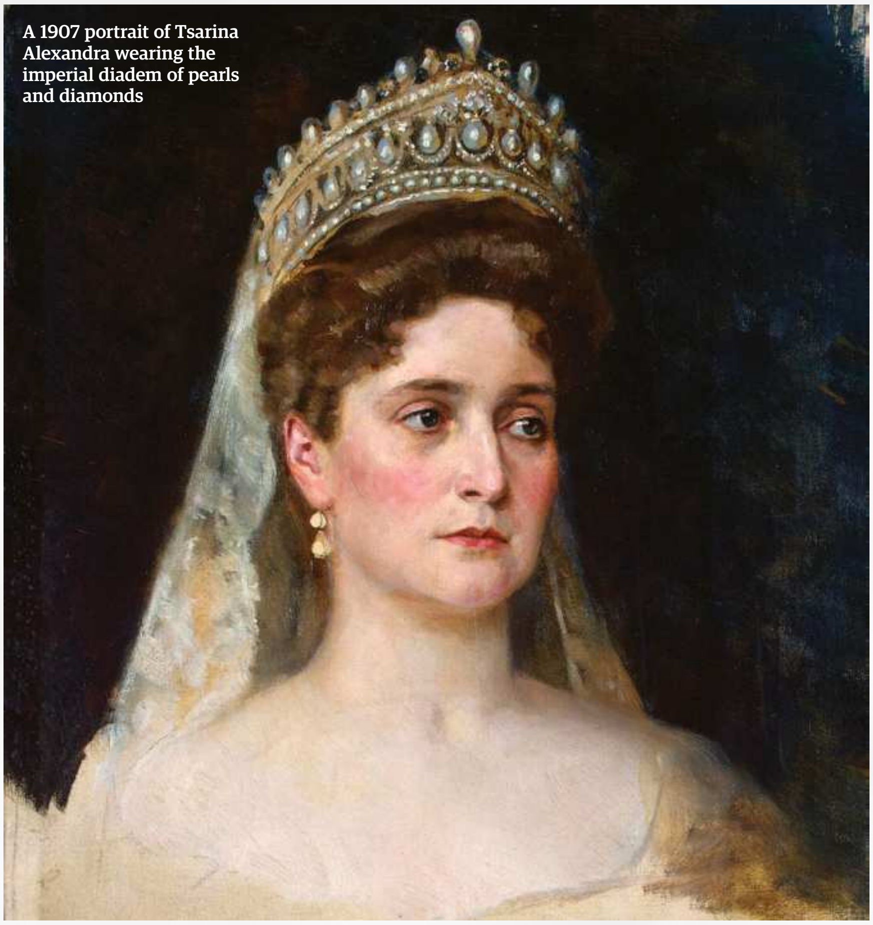
but we do know where some of them ended up, and among the latter is the Romanov Nuptial Crown.

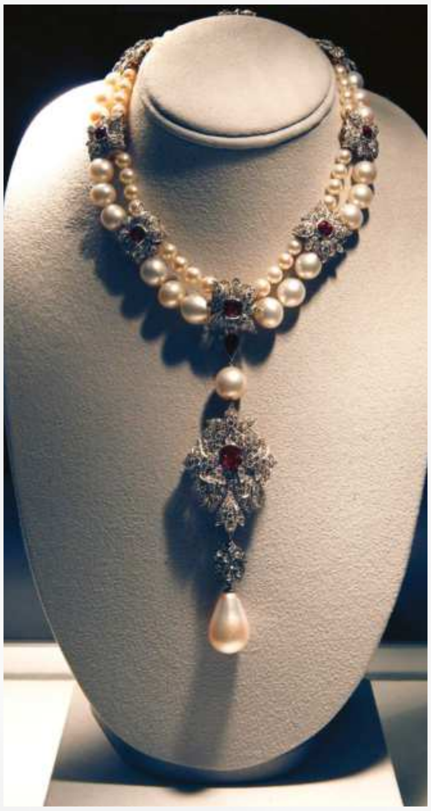
The Nuptial Crown had been fashioned out of approximately 1,500 old-mine diamonds that had once adorned the clothing of Catherine the Great. The diamonds were set in double rows on red velvet, surrounded with smaller brilliants and surmounted by a cross that was made from six large stones. The crown is of uncertain craftsmanship, but is believed to have been made in the early 1840s by Nichols and Plinkle, a St Petersburg jeweller and holder of a Royal Warrant. The tradition of this crown is that every imperial bride wore it, whether marrying into or out of the House of Romanov. It was bought at the Christie's auction by Marjorie Merriweather Post, and it can be seen today at Hillwood, the former Post estate and now a museum, in Washington, DC.

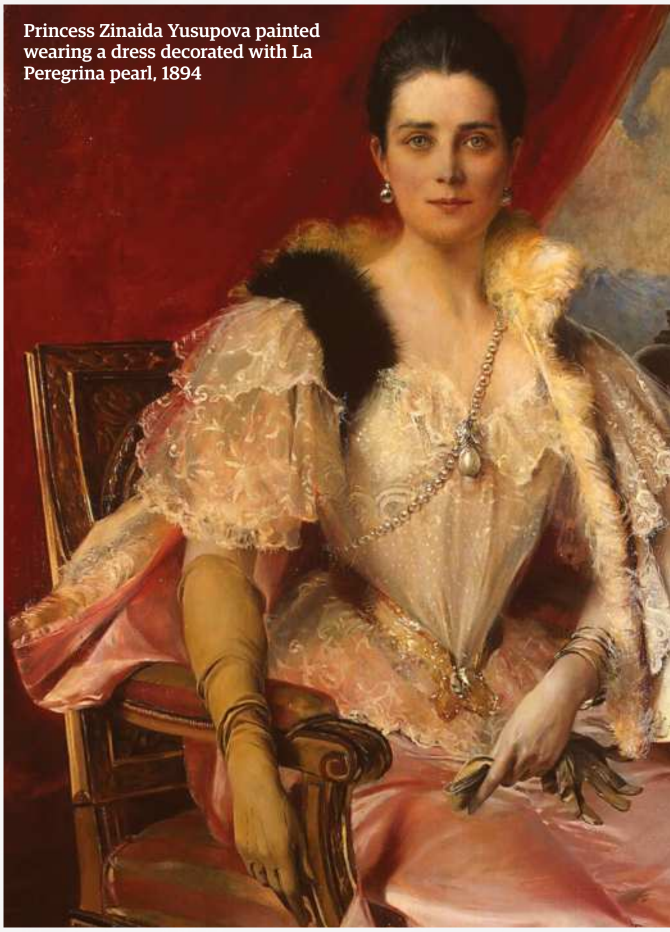
The Diamond Fund was a treasure trove that fell into the hands of the communist government almost as an afterthought in 1926. But in the immediate aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917, the collections of treasure most vulnerable to Bolshevik looting were those of the extended imperial family, who left huge numbers of valuable items behind them in their palaces as they ran for their lives. Several members of the family were not resident in St Petersburg during the October Revolution, and among these was Nicholas's mother, the Dowager Empress Maria, who had been living in a palace in Kiev when it became obvious that she could not return to her homes in and around St Petersburg, the Anichkov and Gatchina Palaces. All of her property inside these palaces was seized by the Petrograd Soviets and photographed and inventoried.

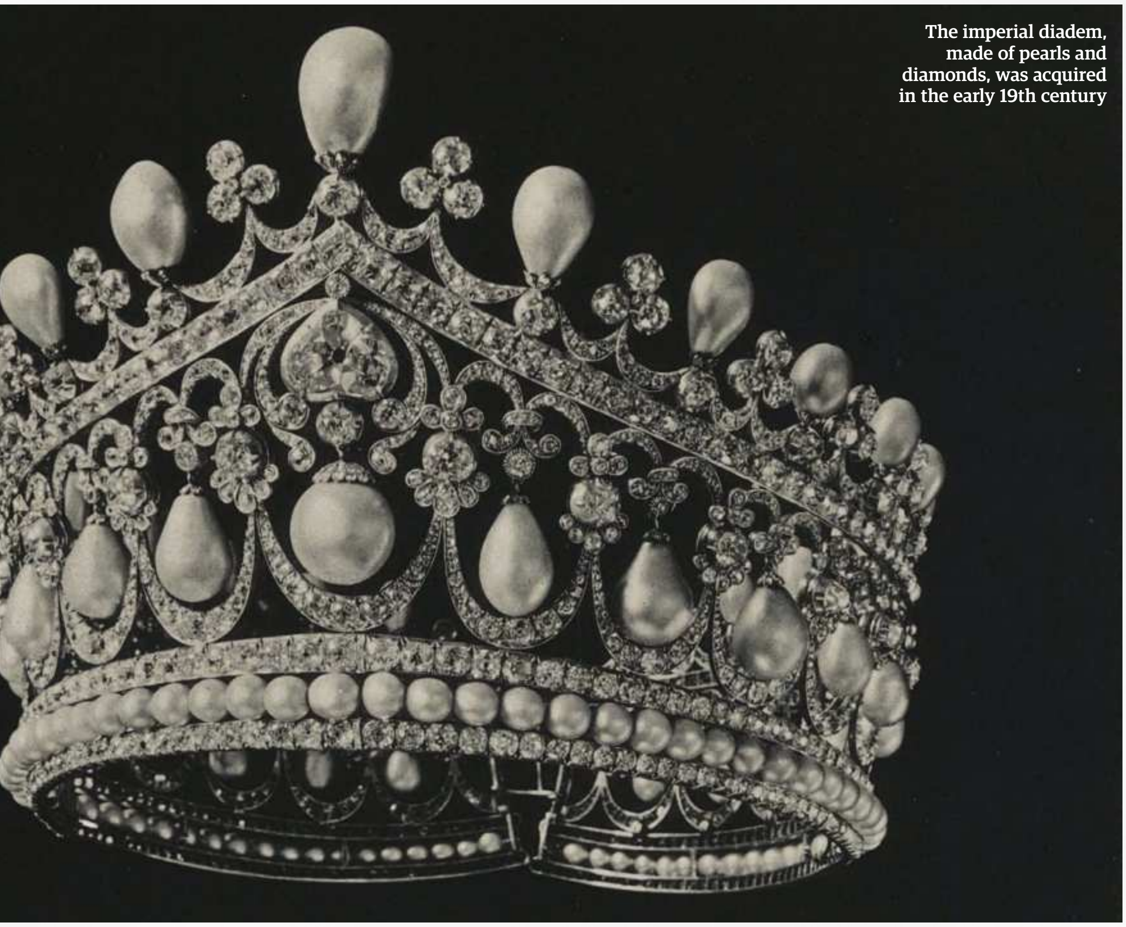
"ALL OF HER PROPERTY INSIDE THESE PALACES WAS SEIZED BY THE SOVIETS"

Empress Maria herself left Russia from the Crimea in 1919 aboard a British warship, the HMS Marlborough. A sister of the British Queen Alexandra, Maria spent the rest of her life at home in Denmark, or visiting Alexandra in England. When she died in Copenhagen in 1928, Maria left a final collection of personal treasure in a jewellery box that she kept next to her bed. This box was brought to London, where its contents were appraised by the

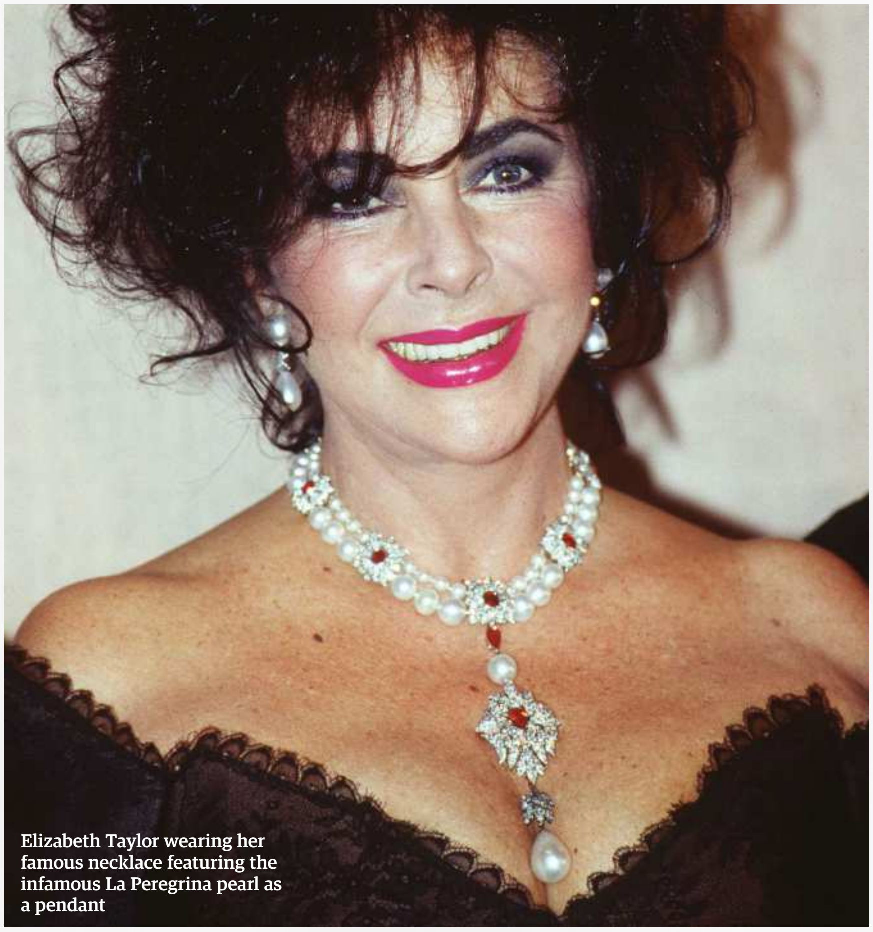

A 1907 portrait of Tsarina Alexandra wearing the imperial diadem of pearls and diamonds


La Peregrina pearl as a pendant on a ruby, diamond and pearl necklace by Cartier. The necklace was owned by Elizabeth Taylor


Princess Zinaida Yusupova painted wearing a dress decorated with La Peregrina pearl, 1894



The imperial diadem, made of pearls and diamonds, was acquired in the early 19th century



Elizabeth Taylor wearing her famous necklace featuring the infamous La Peregrina pearl as a pendant

jeweller Hennells at the amount of £155,000 (in modern currency about £8.8 million or $11 million) before being returned to the empress's two daughters, Grand Duchesses Xenia and Olga. At this time, Britain's Queen Mary bought only four items from the grand duchesses, and - contrary to rumour - she paid fair market value. Over time, the queen added more items to her collection, but she always paid appropriate amounts to Xenia and Olga.

Empress Marie's granddaughter - and Nicholas's only niece - Princess Irina of Russia, was married to the wealthiest noble in Russia, Prince Felix Yusupov. Following the October Revolution, the intrepid Prince made a foolhardy raid on his own house, the Yusupov Palace on the Moika Canal in St Petersburg, and managed to escape with two Rembrandts that he had cut out of their frames, and pockets stuffed full of loose gems and smaller pieces of jewellery. Felix's mother, the legendary beauty Princess Zenaida, escaped Russia with many of her jewels, including the 133 grain pearl known as La Peregrina. Following Zenaida's death in 1939, La Peregrina was sold to a Geneva jeweller. From there, the pearl was purchased by the actor Richard Burton and given to his wife Elizabeth Taylor. Taylor had La Peregrina set as a drop in a pearl-and-ruby necklace by Cartier. This necklace, and La Peregrina, is believed to remain in Taylor's estate.

The palaces and bank vaults of other imperial family relatives were seized as quickly as could be accomplished and inventories were made by the Bolsheviks, who saw the valuables within as a source of cash that could then be used to launch the new Soviet government's plan of industrialisation. But the Soviet itself was not without those who chose to benefit personally from the seizure of Romanov wealth. Lenin himself requisitioned one of the former emperor's automobiles, a lavish Delaunay-Belleville limousine, in which he had himself driven around St Petersburg. This act of looting must have happened very shortly after the October Revolution and was soon surpassed by a more audacious act of robbery when one day Lenin was car-jacked on the streets of the city and found himself having to walk back to the Duma building. Thereafter, he confined himself to a more common Rolls-Royce limo.

The requisitioned and inventoried treasure was eventually organised for sale by the Soviets in salesrooms set up in Moscow, where interested foreigners were encouraged to purchase the art of a fallen imperial culture. The salesrooms were forbidden to Russians, and only hard-currency sales were permitted. Many pieces were bought by American businessman Armand Hammer, who kept some pieces for his own art collection, but who also made many more pieces available for purchase through department stores in New York City. This became a valuable source of income for the nascent Soviet government, and via this route, a number of pieces of Romanov treasure disappeared into the households and private collections of unknown and - at this distance of time - probably unidentifiable individuals. Armand Hammer is today one of the best-known 20th-century collectors of Russian art.

Another well-known collector of Russian art was Marjorie Merriweather Post. The heiress of the Post Cereal fortune, Post was married to an American diplomat called Joseph E Davis, who was the United States ambassador to the Soviet Union for 18 months from 1936 to 1938. During her time in Moscow, she was invited to visit the Soviet salesrooms. They had largely all been picked clean by the time she made her first visit, but she still managed to find several stunning pieces, as well as large amounts of tarnished silver and pewter - which she was able to buy by weight, bring home and polish up. All of these items, together with her purchases from the 1927 Christie's sale in London, can be visited today at Hillwood.

If Hammer and Post were in the first generation of collectors of requisitioned imperial and Romanov jewellery and art, then Malcolm Forbes may be said to be in the forefront of the second generation, together with several institutions such as the Virginia Museum of Fine Art. Malcolm Forbes built an impressive collection of former imperial possessions, including nine Fabergé eggs that had been created for the empresses Marie and Alexandra. In 2004, 13 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, events began to come full circle as the Russian industrialist Viktor Vekselberg began buying collections of imperial art - including the Forbes Collection - and returning them to Russia. This repatriation of Russian cultural pieces is admirable, but can never really be complete, given that many of the pieces have been sold and re-sold the length and breadth of the world, and many have been lost or forgotten in the meantime.

In July 1918, the Red guards selected as the execution squad for the Romanovs had the unnerving experience of seeing their carefully aimed bullets literally bounce off the torsos of the young grand duchesses, who screamed as they ran back and forth across the basement murder room. After their first attempts failed, the guards retreated to the outside corridor to regroup and to discuss what on Earth - or from Heaven - was happening with what should have been a straightforward execution by shooting. Nicholas, Alexandra, the family doctor and two servants had been dispatched of relatively cleanly, but the five children and the maid seemed impervious to their lead.

Fortifying themselves with alcohol - and some no doubt secretly resorting to prayer - the executioners entered the room armed with bayonets and revolvers. This time, there was no reprieve, and soon all 11 members of the last Romanov household lay dead or dying on the floor.

Then, as the guards moved around the room, positioning the bodies to be stretchered out to the waiting stake-bed pick-up truck that would carry the deceased family to their gravesites, they noticed gashes and slashes in the clothing of the young women. Gleaming through these holes, they could see the brightly coloured precious stones, pearls and gold of the remaining Romanov treasure.

Undoubtedly intended to finance a brand-new life in another country - or to buy their way out of treacherous peril - the valuable jewels had been sewn into the corsets and undergarments of the grand duchesses and Alexei and had served as makeshift bullet-proof vests, an unexpected side-effect and a literal demonstration of the jewels' ability to protect the lives of the young Romanov children.

Some 17 pounds in weight of jewellery - loose stones, necklaces, gold wire, bracelets and earrings - were recovered and returned to Moscow by the local Soviet. These jewels represented but a fraction of the total jewellery and valuables the imperial family took into exile. As the Romanovs were kept in confinement in the Governor's House in Tobolsk, they could not help but be aware that their wellbeing was at the centre of several

MAKING MILLIONS

How Lenin sold the treasure for tractors

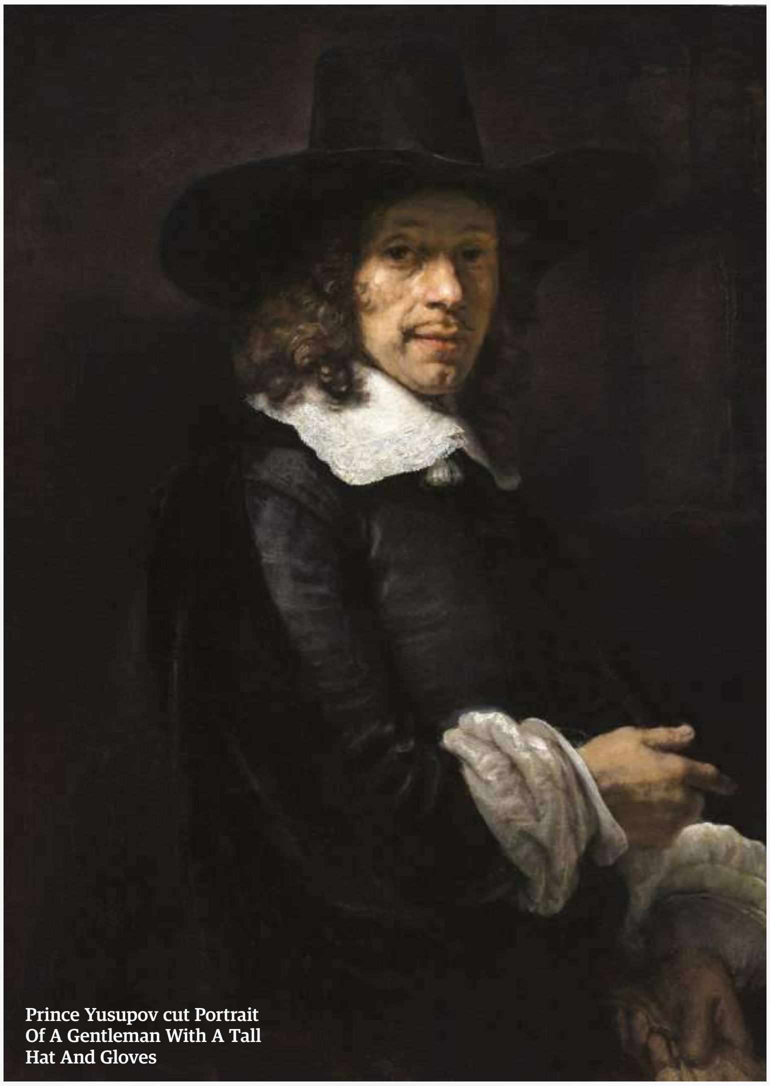
After the costly years of WWI and the Russian Civil War, Russia was in bad shape and its population had been depleted of landowners, business owners and its traditional leadership, the nobility. Lenin knew he would have to rebuild the country literally from the ground up, and so his government determined that one course of action would be to sell looted valuables and use the cash proceeds to purchase tractors and other farming equipment. But by the time the party had completed a study of their loot, separating out what would be kept back and cataloguing that which would be offered for sale, the art market had hit a worldwide slump and the Soviets found out that their valuables would not sell for the amount they wanted.

An article in the *Atlanta Constitution* from 24 July 1929 reported on a delegation of American businessmen and wealthy collectors unofficially visiting Russia to purchase art and jewellery. The story ran, "Although members of the group purchased many thousands of dollars worth of paintings and other art objects from the Soviet Government, they came to one place where even American wealth was powerless." What the Americans were unable to buy was a selection of the Russian Diamond Fund, the least expensive piece of which was for sale for $1 million, and the 190-carat Orloff Diamond, which the article stated the Soviets wanted "to convert into plough shares, locomotives and tractors."

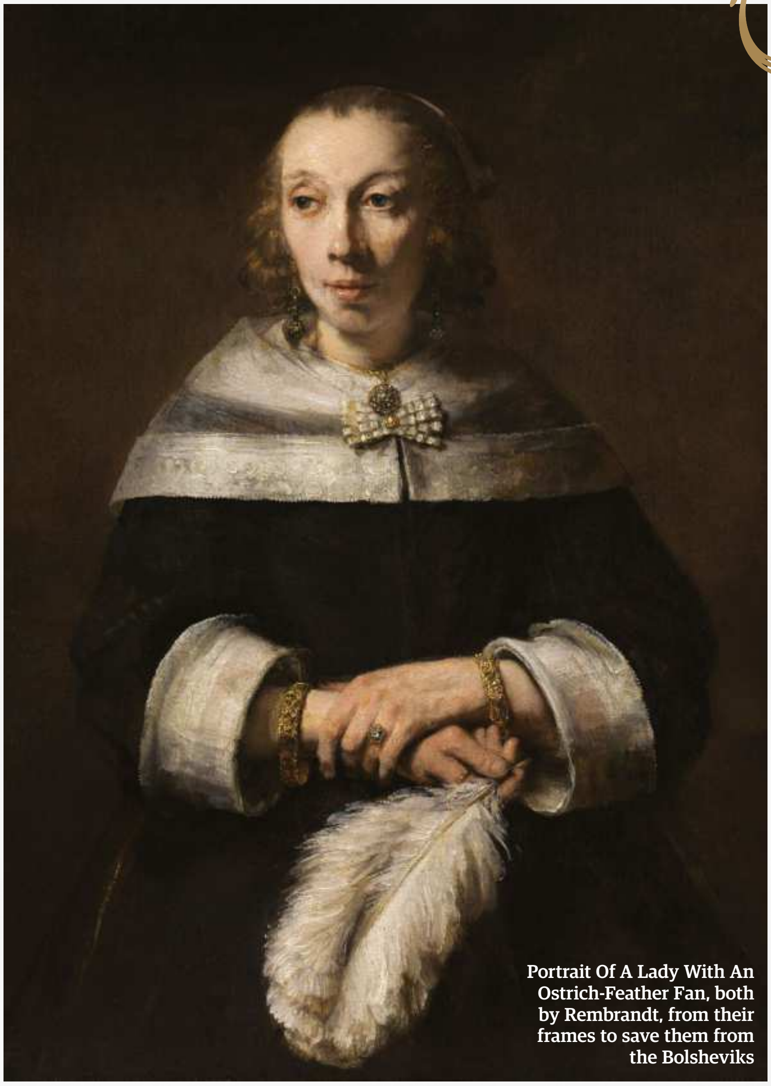
Several sales did take place, however, with Western financiers like Andrew Mellon, the US secretary of the treasury from 1921 to 1932. While publicly supporting trade sanctions and embargoes between the US and the Soviet Union, Mellon saw no issue with purchasing no fewer than 25 masterpieces from the Hermitage Museum, offered by the Soviets in a private sale.

If the Soviets found a buyer in Mellon but not an ally in international politics, in others, such as American capitalist Armand Hammer, they found someone willing to assist in facilitating sales in the US. Hammer was a valuable conduit of imperial and Diamond Fund items from Russia to the showrooms of various department stores in New York City. The services rendered by individuals like Hammer, and sales of larger items to the extremely wealthy, combined with a few sales that happened at Christie's and Sotheby's, brought some revenue to the Soviets, but the Diamond Fund sales and sales of other valuables in the 1920s and 1930s were not major sources of income, and the 'plough shares for tractors' plan was ultimately a failure. There was little financial value gained, and so the sales made no real economic sense

In the end, considering that in the first years of power Lenin brokered a deal with the British government that allowed him to buy some of the most advanced airplane engines of the time from the Rolls Royce company, it would be appropriate to ask just how cash-strapped the Soviets were. Money raised through loot sales is not estimated to have been much more than a drop in the bucket. Lenin, however, knew how to make a deal, and as a sweetener, Rolls Royce offered a 15 per cent discount on one of their automobiles - which Lenin happily snapped up.



Prince Yusupov cut Portrait Of A Gentleman With A Tall Hat And Gloves



Portrait Of A Lady With An Ostrich-Feather Fan, both by Rembrandt, from their frames to save them from the Bolsheviks

> “THE EXECUTION SQUAD HAD THE UNNERVING EXPERIENCE OF SEEING THEIR CAREFULLY AIMED BULLETS LITERALLY BOUNCE OFF THE TORSOS OF THE YOUNG GRAND DUCHESSES”

probably nefarious plans to extract money and wealth from the supply line that radiated out from friends in Moscow and St Petersburg to the family in Siberia. In order to safeguard the majority of their remaining fortune, 197 items of extreme literal and historical value were smuggled out of the Governor's House, carried by faithful friends and retainers and distributed among the Romanov faithful in the townsfolk.

In 1933, Stalin turned his attention to the lost Romanov valuables, and he sent the NKVD (successors of the tsarist Cheka and precursors of the KGB) to conduct an investigation among Tobolsk's townspeople and the former members of the Romanov household there, some of whom had not left Russia, and who were living all across the country. The investigation was a short and brutal one in which several people, including one of the imperial children's teachers, Klaudia Bittner Kobylinsky, were arrested and shot in retaliation for loyalty to the dead Romanovs. In the end, 154 of the hidden items of jewellery and jeweller's art were recovered from the various hiding places inside walls and wells, and were exhumed from backyard holes. These items were returned by the NKVD agents to Moscow, where a few were delegated to remain in the Kremlin Armoury, but many were directed to the Soviet salesrooms and to where they were sold in order to raise money for the state.

There is no doubt that Soviet policy sacrificed Russia's cultural and artistic heritage in order to finance its planned industrialisation; but the extent of this policy may be illustrated in one final anecdote. In 1891, the 21-year-old Grand Duchess Alexandra Georgievna, born a princess of Greece and married to the Russian Grand Duke Paul Alexandrovich, died in childbirth. The greatly beloved young woman was buried in accordance with imperial tradition in the Peter and Paul Fortress. In 1939, the king of Greece, Alexandra's nephew, approached the Soviet Government for permission to repatriate his aunt's body in accordance with her mother's last wishes. Stalin agreed that the exhumation and repatriation could only take place, allegedly, in exchange for a certain number of tractors.

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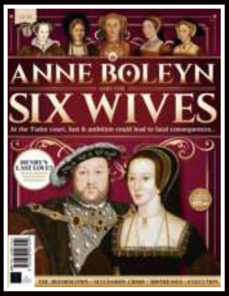
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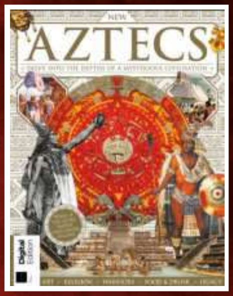

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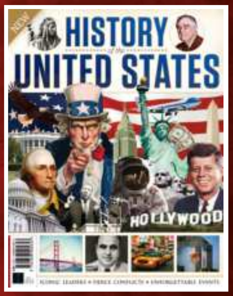
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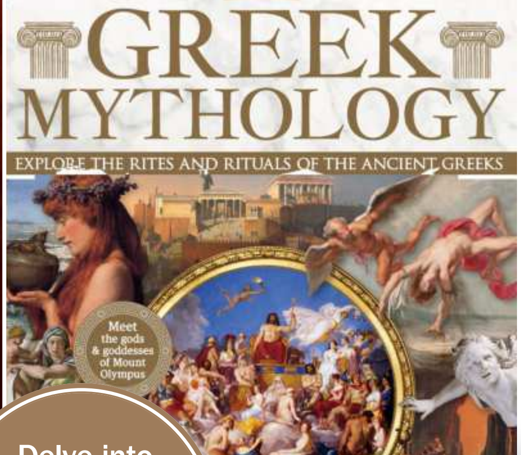
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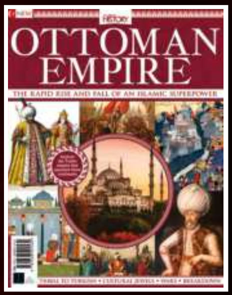
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